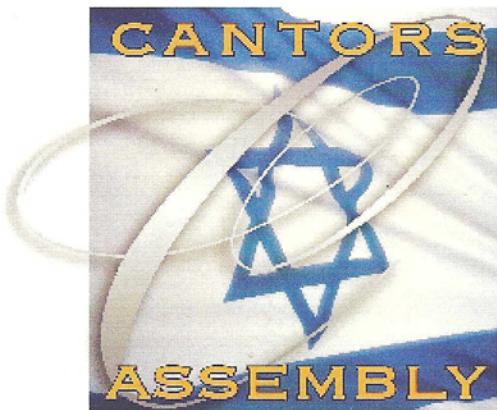


# **61<sup>st</sup> Annual Cantors Assembly Convention**



CELEBRATING ISRAEL @ 60

**June  
15-19,  
2008**

## **KOL YISRAEL**

**Hudson Valley Resort and Spa  
Kerhonkson, NY**

## **Convention Co-Chairs**

Hazzanim Sheldon Levin, David Propis and Marcey Wagner

## **Convention Committee**

Hazzanim Rebecca Carmi, Joseph Gole, Eric Snyder,  
Stephen J. Stein, Steven Stoehr and Mr. Jay Neufeld

## **Convention Management Committee**

Hazzanim Cary Cohen and Lance Tapper, Co-chairs

## **Convention Committee**

Hazzanim Richard Berlin, Sue Deutsch, Elihu Flax, Daniel Gale,  
Ralph Goren, Michael Krausman, Marcia Lane, Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo,  
Robert Lieberman, Rachel Littman, Josh Perlman, Sidney Rabinowitz,  
Andrea Raizen, Allan Robuck, Eric Snyder, Alan Sokoloff,  
Steve Stoehr, Deborah Tanzer-Cohen, Arlyne Unger.  
Steven Hevenstone is a CICA member.  
Zach Mondrow is a cantorial student.  
Jay Neufeld and Matthew Neufeld are CA staff.

## **Convention T'filah Coordinator**

Hazzan Ralph Goren

## **Ad Book Chair**

Hazzan Rebecca Carmi

## **Accompanists**

Tova Marcos and Scott Stein

## **Coaching**

Coordinator: Hazzan Michelle Freedman  
Coaches: Hazzanim Nathan Lam, Jacob Ben Zion Mendelson,  
Alberto Mizrahi, Chaim Najman, David Propis, Simon Spiro,  
Faith Steinsnyder, Sam Weiss, Sol Zim

**Music Permission:** *Transcontinental Music, Tara Music*

**Printer:** Roy D. Smith, RDS Inc.

## **Cantors Assembly**

Jewish Theological Seminary  
3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE 61ST ANNUAL CANTORS ASSEMBLY CONVENTION



June 15 ~ 19, 2008

Hudson Valley Resort and Spa  
Kerhonkson, New York

Hazzan Gregory Yaroslow, *Editor*

Hazzan Joseph Levine, *Associate Editor*

Ms. Leah Holland and Hazzan Judith E. Meyersberg,  
*Transcribers*

Roy D. Smith, *Cover and Design*

**The Cantors Assembly**

464 South Hawkins Avenue  
Akron, Ohio 44320

## Cantors Assembly Officers and Executive Council

July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008

President: Joseph Gole

Senior Vice President: David Propis

Vice President at Large: Jack Chomsky

Vice President Administration: Nancy Abramson

Treasurer: Alberto Mizrahi

Secretary: Alisa Pomerantz-Boro

Executive Vice President: Stephen J. Stein

Executive Administrator: Eric Snyder

Placement Director: Robert Scherr

Director of Strategic Projects: Rebecca Carmi

### Executive Council

Moshe Bear (2010)

Richard Berlin (2009)

Rebecca Carmi (2009)

Carol Chesler (2008)

Sanford Cohn (2008)

Stephen Freedman (2009)

Chayim Frenkel (2009)

Shimon Gewirtz (2008)

Ralph Goren (2008)

Linda Kates (2008)

Kim Komrad (2010)

David Lipp (2008)

Keith Miller (2010)

Jeffrey Myers (2008)

Josh Perlman (2010)

Paula Pepperstone (2010)

Eva Robbins (2009)

Murray Simon (2010)

Simon Spiro (2009)

Bruce Wetzler (2010)

### Ex-Officio

Shabtai Ackerman <sup>77</sup>

Saul Hammerman

Robert Kieval

Nathan Lam

Sheldon Levin

Abraham Lubin

Jacob Ben Zion Mendelson

Solomon Mendelson

Chaim Najman

Ivan Perlman

Henry Rosenblum

Morton Shames

Kurt Silberman

Stephen J. Stein

Steven Stoehr

Larry Vieder

Isaac I. Wall

## Cantors Assembly Mission Statement

The Cantors Assembly, the largest body of Hazzanim in the world, is the professional organization of Cantors which serves the Jewish world. We are a founder and supporter of the Cantors Institute, now the H.L. Miller Cantorial School, of The Jewish Theological Seminary. We are affiliated with the Conservative Movement.

Since our founding in 1947, we have remained faithful, as clergy, to our principles:

- to help our members serve the spiritual and religious needs of their congregants
- to preserve and enhance the traditions of Jewish prayer and synagogue music
- to maintain the highest standards for our sacred calling and those who practice it.

We safeguard the interests of our members by:

- providing placement services, retirement and pension programs
- publishing materials of Jewish liturgy, music and education
- fostering a spirit of collegiality, cooperation and continued professional growth
- representing Hazzanim to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities at large.

We will build on the traditions of the past and will continue to inspire young people to train for the Cantorate. We will teach and touch future generations of Jews through:

- Jewish liturgy, music and singing
- continued development of creative, vibrant programs
- the personal rapport our members extend to millions of adults and children.

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CELEBRATING ISRAEL @ 60

\_\_\_\_ SUNDAY, JUNE 15TH \_\_\_\_

2:00 pm – 5:00 pm Registration	Lobby
Hazzanim Eric Snyder (Cherry Hill, NJ), Lance Tapper (Bermuda Dunes, CA), Carey Cohen (Glendale WI) and Mr. Jay Neufeld	
2:00 pm – 6:00 pm, Cyber Café	Library
10:00 – Midnight drinks, snacks, free computer use	
Chair: Hazzan Matthew Axelrod (Scotch Plains, NJ)	
<b>Vendors:</b> Shop with our convention vendors at your leisure for music, Jewish art, tallitot, software, books and Judaica	Lobby
4:00 pm Friday Alive and Zemirot Without Instruments	Empire
Hazzan Joel Caplan (Caldwell, NJ)	
Chair: Hazzan Moshe Bear (Dix Hills, NY)	
5:00 pm	Empire
מַנְחָה: Hazzan Stacy Joy Sokol (East Rockaway, NY)	
5:45 pm Dinner	Ballrooms B-C
Chair: Hazzan David Propis (Houston, TX)	
בְּרִכַּת הַמִּזְוֹן: Hazzan Arthur Katlin (Lawrenceville, NJ)	
נְשָׂרָה: Zalmen Mlotek and the NY Region	
7:00 pm Memorial Awards	Ballroom A
Chair: Hazzan Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH)	
Max Wohlberg Award for Composition: Hazzan Meir Finkelstein	
Gregor Shelkan Award for Mentoring: Hazzan Henry Rosenblum	
Moshe Nathanson Award for Conducting: Hazzan Sheldon Levin	
David Putterman Award for Lifetime Achievement: Hazzan Saul Hammerman	
Yehudah Mandel Award for Humanitarian Acts: Hazzan Richard Wolberg	
Moses Silverman Award for Service: Hazzan Stephen J. Stein	
7:45 pm	Ballroom A
מַעֲרֵיב: Hazzan Charles Osborne (Lords Valley, PA) and the Boston Hebrew College Chorus	
Conductor: Hazzan Joseph Ness (West Hartford, CT)	
8:45 pm Concert: Yiddish Theater Tribute	Manhattan
Chair: Hazzan Arianne Brown (Los Angeles, CA)	
Director: Zalmen Mlotek	
Hazzanim and Cantorial Students: Moshe Bear (Dix Hills, NY), Arianne Brown (Los Angeles, CA), Amy Goldstein (New York, NY), Martin Goldstein (Denver, CO), Ayelet Piatigorsky (New York, NY) and Sam Weiss (Paramus, NJ)	
10:30 pm Kumsitz	Lobby or
Bring your instruments and voices	Gazebo



**CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60**

**MONDAY, JUNE 16TH**

**6:00 am Gym Open**

**7:00 am**

**Columbia**

**שחרית:** Hazzan Moshe Bear (Melville, NY)

**בעל קרייה:** Moshe Pinchover (CICA-West Hartford, CT)

Gabbai: Hazzan Daniel Green (Toms River, NJ)

D'var Torah: Hazzan Marcia Lane (Oakhurst, NJ)

**7:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast**

**Ballrooms B-C**

**8:00 am Breakfast with Officers and Regional Chairs**

**Orange**

**9:00 am – 12:45 pm, Cyber Café**

**Library**

**2:00 pm – 6:00 pm, drinks, snacks, free computer use**

**9:00 pm – Midnight**

**Vendors:** Shop with our convention vendors at your leisure for music, Jewish art, tallitot, software, books and Judaica

**Lobby**

**9:00 am The Ideal 21st Century Conservative Synagogue**

**Manhattan**

Chair: Hazzan Stephen J. Stein: Executive Vice President, Cantors Assembly

Dr. Stephen Epstein: President, Congregation Beth Yeshurun, Houston, TX;

Dr. Raymond Goldstein: President, United Synagogue Of Conservative Judaism;

Rabbi Joel Meyers: Executive Vice President, the Rabbinical Assembly;

Cory Schneider: President, Women's League For Conservative Judaism;

Rabbi Charles Simon: Executive Director, Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

**10:30 am Keynote: Reaching Every Jew**

**Ballroom A**

**Through Music – Debbie Friedman**

Chair: Hazzan David Propis (Houston, TX)

**11:30 am Concurrent Breakout Sessions:**

**A) Fusing The New with Nusach**

**Empire**

Hazzan Jacob Ben Zion Mendelson (White Plains, NY)

**B) New Tunes for Congregations and Children**

**Columbia**

Hazzanim Alisa Pomerantz-Boro (Cherry Hill, NJ),

Mimi Haselkorn (Tarzana, CA), Anita Schubert (Manchester, CT) and

Arlyne Unger (Erdenheim, PA)

**C) How Should We Train the Cantors of the Future?**

**Dutchess**

Chair: Hazzan Henry Rosenblum, Dean, H. L. Miller Cantorial School

Panelists: Hazzanim Scott Sokol, Dean, Cantorial School Boston Hebrew College and Nathan Lam, Dean, Cantorial School Academy of Jewish Religion, Los Angeles

**12:45 pm Lunch**

**Tent**

Officers, New Members and CICA

**Ballroom B**

Education Committee Meeting

**Mimi's Table**

CELEBRATING ISRAEL @ 60

MONDAY, JUNE 16TH  
(continued)

2:00 pm Multiple Tracks Session One:

A) Cantorial Track, *Cantorial Master Class*

Hazzan Faith Steinsnyder (Perth Amboy, NJ)

Empire

B) Chaplaincy Track, *Spiritual Assessment, Illness & Health*

Hazzan Robert Scherr; Williams College (Williamstown, MA)  
and Rev. Harlan Ratmeyer: *Director of Chaplaincy Services  
for Albany Medical Center*

Columbia

C) Educational Track-4Mat

Dr. Cindy Dolgin (New York, NY) and

Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Jericho, NY)

Hudson One

D) Spirituality Track

Hazzan David Lefkowitz (New York, NY) and

Rabbi Jonathan Slater: *Spirituality Institute (New York, NY)*

Hudson Three

E) Technology

Hazzanim Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ) and

Neil Schwartz (Saskatoon, Canada)

Dutchess

3:30 pm Choral Rehearsal

Conductor: Hazzan Jeremy Lipton (Los Angeles, CA)

Columbia

Band Rehearsal

Director: Hazzan Kenneth Richmond (Natick, MA)

Ballroom A

Dance Rehearsal

Director: Hazzan Heather Batchelor (Port Chester, NY)

Ulster

Individual Coachings

Rooms TBA

Membership Interviews

Hudson Two

5:00 pm Challenging Issues For Women Cantors

Dutchess

Hazzan Erica Lippitz (S. Orange, NJ)

Free Time, Rehearsals,

Rooms TBA

Individual Coachings

6:00 pm Dinner

Ballrooms B-C

Chair: Benjamin Maissner (Toronto, Canada)

Introduction of Leibele Glantz Book: Jerry Glantz

Introduction of Tzedakah Table: Hazzan Elisha Dienstfrey (Alexandria, VA)

Presentation of Completed Scholarships:

Hazzan Nancy Abramson Scholarship Fund

Ilana and Hazzan Earl G. Berris Scholarship Fund

ברכת המזון: Hazzan Stacy Sokol (East Rockaway, NY)

ברכת נשים: Hazzan David F. Tilman (Elkins Park, PA) and  
the Delaware Valley Region



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CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60

MONDAY, JUNE 16TH  
(continued)

7:30 pm	Tent or Ballroom A
<b>מנחה:</b> Hazzan Richard Berlin (Pittsburgh, PA)	
<b>מעירם:</b> Hazzan Henry Rosenblum (New York, NY) and students of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School	
<b>8:30 pm Abraham Shapiro ז"ל Memorial Concert</b>	Manhattan
<i>Honoring Members of the Assembly of Fifty Years or Longer</i>	
Producer: Emanuel Perlman (Baltimore, MD)	
Hazzanim: Stephen Freedman (Dresher, PA), Thom King (Baltimore, MD), Kim Komrad (Gaithersburg, MD), Robert Lieberman (Syracuse, NY), Jacob Ben Zion Mendelson (White Plains, NY), Emanuel Perlman (Baltimore, MD), Joshua Perlman (Rockville, MD), Richard Perlman (Warwick, RI), Robert Scherr (Williamstown, MA), Eliot Vogel (Penn Valley, PA), Yitzhak Zhabker (Dallas, TX)	
<b>10:00 pm Visions</b>	Manhattan
Chair: Hazzan Allan Robuck (Orlando, FL)	
<b>11:00 pm Promenade Concert</b>	Empire
Masters of Ceremonies: Hazzanim Matthew Axelrod (Scotch Plains, NJ) and Larry Goller (Highland Park, IL)	

— TUESDAY, JUNE 17TH —

6:00 am Gym Open	
7:00 am	Columbia
<b>שחרית:</b> Hazzan Carol Chesler (Huntington, NY)	
Gabbai: Hazzan Daniel Green (Toms River, NJ)	
D'var Torah: Hazzan Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo (Farmington Hills, MI)	
<b>7:00 am Yoga and Meditations</b>	Ulster
Using music by Meir Finkelstein set to morning prayers, meditations, <i>kavanot</i> and simple Yoga movements bring new spirituality to your prayers and body. (This is not a complete service.)	
Presenter: Judy Greenfeld (Encino, CA)	
Chair: Hazzan Rachel Hersh Epstein, (Bethesda, MD)	
<b>7:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast</b>	Ballrooms B-C
<b>8:00 am Ex-officio and Officers</b>	Orange
<b>9:00 am – 12:45 pm, Cyber Café</b>	Library
2:00 pm – 6:00 pm, <i>drinks, snacks, free computer use</i>	
<b>10:00 pm – Midnight</b>	
<b>Vendors:</b> Shop with our convention vendors at your leisure for music, Jewish art, tallitot, software, books and Judaica	Lobby

CELEBRATING ISRAEL @ 60

TUESDAY, JUNE 17TH

(continued)

9:00 am New Music Read Through

Tent

Chair: Hazzan Jeffrey Shiovitz (Briarcliff Manor, NY)

Hazzanim Ben Adler (Atlanta, GA), Gaston Bogomolni (Omaha, NE), Avrhym Kenneth Cohen (Honolulu, HI), Gerald Cohen (Scarsdale, NY), Sanford Cohen (West Hartford, CT), Elisheva Dienstfrey (Alexandria, VA), Rachel Epstein (Bethesda, MD), James Gloth (Toledo, OH), Ralph Goren (Margate, NJ), Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo (Farmington Hills, MI), Charles Osborne (Lords Valley, PA), Robbie Solomon (Lexington, MA), Mr. Jayson Radovsky, Transcontinental Music

10:15 am 61st Annual Membership Meeting

Ballroom A

(Closed session – members and spouses only)

Presiding: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

Membership Report and Induction of New Members:

Hazzan Jeffrey Myers (Massapequa, NY)

Fiscal Report: Hazzanim Alberto Mizrahi (Chicago, IL) and

Eric Snyder (Cherry Hill, NJ)

Pension Update: Mitchell Smilowitz, CEO, Joint Retirement Board

Disability Insurance Update: Eric Blumencranz and Peter Gomez, BWD Agency

Presentation of Commissions: Hazzan Eric Snyder,

CA Executive Administrator (Cherry Hill, NJ)

Presentation to Newly Retired Members: Hazzan Daniel Green (Toms River, NJ)

Nominations and Election of Officers and Board:

Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL)

Installation of Officers and Board: Hazzan Arianne Brown (Los Angeles, CA)

President's Report: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

Growth and Development: Hazzan Rebecca Carmi (Beachwood, OH)

Placement Report: Hazzan Robert Scherr (Williamstown, MA)

Convention 2009: Hazzanim Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA)

and David Propis (Houston, TX)

Saul Meisels Award for Hazzanic Excellence to:

Hazzan Alberto Mizrahi (Chicago, IL)

10:15 am Session for Non-Members,

Empire

an Israeli Film: *Ushpizin*

Chair: Steven Heavenstone (CICA-Atlanta, GA)

Membership Testing

Hudson Three

12:30 pm Lunch

Ballrooms B-C

1:30 pm

Ballroom A

תָּמִיכָה: Hazzan Estelle Epstein (Teaneck, NJ)

Samuel Rosenbaum<sup>77</sup> Memorial Award presented to

Hazzan Sam Weiss (Paramus, NJ)

Presenters: Hazzanim Morton Shames (Springfield, MA) and Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH)



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**CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60**  
**TUESDAY, JUNE 17TH**  
*(continued)*

1:45 pm	Samuel Rosenbaum <sup>b7</sup> Lecture Voices of Jewish Music Matthew Lazar and Chorus Chair: Hazzan Nancy Abramson (New York, NY) Choir: Hazzanim TBA	Ballroom A
3:15 pm	Multiple Tracks Session Two: A) Cantorial Track, <i>Cantorial Master Class</i> Hazzan Alberto Mizrahi (Chicago, IL)	Empire
	B) Chaplaincy Track, <i>Life and Death Issues</i> Rabbi Stephen Robbins, Hazzanim Eva Robbins (Los Angeles CA) and Deborah Tanzer-Cohen, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (Philadelphia, PA)	Columbia
	C) Educational Track-4Mat Dr. Cindy Dolgin (New York, NY) and Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Jericho, NY)	Hudson One
	D) Spirituality Track Hazzan David Lefkowitz (New York, NY) and Rabbi Jonathan Slater, Spirituality Institute	Hudson Three
	E) Technology, <i>Managing Torah Readers with the Web and Music Publishing</i> Hazzanim Gaston Bogomolni (Omaha, NE) and Richard Berlin (Pittsburgh, PA)	Dutchess
4:45 pm	Choral Rehearsal Conductor: Hazzan Jeremy Lipton (Los Angeles, CA)	Columbia
	Band Rehearsal Director: Hazzan Kenneth Richmond (Natick, MA)	Ballroom A
	Dance Rehearsal Director: Hazzan Heather Batchelor (Port Chester, NY)	Ulster
	Individual Coachings	Rooms TBA
	Membership Interviews	Hudson Two
5:45 pm	Free Time, Individual Rehearsals, Individual Coachings or Yoga and Mincha Meditations: (see Tuesday, 7:00 am)	Rooms TBA
6:30 pm	DINNER Chair: Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Jericho, NY) הַבָּה נְשִׁיר: Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ) and the NJ Region ברכת המזון: Hazzan Wayne Kreiger (Marlboro, NJ)	Ulster
		Ballrooms B-C

CELEBRATING ISRAEL @ 60

— TUESDAY, JUNE 17TH —

(continued)

8:15 pm

Ballroom A

**מעריב**: Hazzan Moshe Taubé (Pittsburgh, PA)

Conductor: Sol Zim (Hollis Hills, NY) and Men's Chorus

Shoah Memorial **הנזכרה**: Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL)

**כל מלא**: Hazzan Moshe Taubé (Pittsburgh, PA)

9:15 pm Concert: The Music of Meir Finkelstein

Manhattan

Producer: Hazzan Alan Smolen (Ventnor City, NJ)

Hazzanim: Elizabeth Berke (Springfield, MA), Steven Berke (Springfield, MA),

Scott Buckner (Minnetonka, MN), Rebecca Carmi (Beachwood, OH),

Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH), Paul Dorman (Northridge, NJ),

Meir Finkelstein (Southfield, MI), Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA),

Sam Josephson (Fair Lawn, NJ), Alberto Mizrahi (Chicago, IL),

Alisa Pomerantz-Boro (Cherry Hill, NJ), David Propis (Houston, TX),

Lance Tapper (Bermuda Dunes, CA) and Ms. Pamela Schiffer (East Lansing, MI),

New Jersey Cantors Concert Ensemble and the Stephen Glass Singers –

Conductor: Stephen Glass

11:15 pm Ice Cream Party and Regional Parties

Lobby

— WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18TH —

6:00 am Gym Open

Columbia

**שחרית**: Hazzan Ralph Goren (Margate, NJ)

Gabbai: Hazzan Daniel Green (Toms River, NJ)

D'var Torah: Hazzan Richard Wolberg (Fall River, MA)

7:00 am Yoga and Meditations: (see Tuesday, 7:00 am)

Ulster

7:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast

Ballrooms B-C

8:00 am Officer's Think Tank

Orange

9:00 am – 12:45 pm, Cyber Café

Library

2:00 pm – 6:30 pm, drinks, snacks, free computer use

10:00 pm – Midnight

Vendors: Shop with our convention vendors at your leisure  
for music, Jewish art, tallitot, software, books and Judaica

Lobby

9:00 am Plenary Session

Manhattan

Memorial to Departed Colleagues:

**חספֶד**: Hazzan Josh Perlman (Rockville, MD)

**כל מלא** : Hazzan Shira Belfer (New York, NY)

Annual Address: Hazzan Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH),  
Executive Vice President, Cantors Assembly

Envisioning a New Future for the Cantorate:

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, Dean: Zeigler Rabbinical School

**CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60**  
**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18TH**  
*(continued)*

**10:15 am – 11:15 am CONCURRENT SESSIONS:**

**A) Placement Issues (*How To Interview, Improve Your Resume and CD, Negotiating Techniques*)**

Hazzanim Robert Scherr (Williamstown, MA) and Eric Wasser (Fair Lawn, NJ)

Dutchess

**B) Adapting To Changing Congregations**

*(How to adapt so you don't need to change jobs)*

Chair: Hazzan Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH) with Hazzanim Allan Robuck (Orlando, FL) and Lorna Wallach-Kallet (Millburn, NJ)

Columbia

**C) Planning a Concert and Fundraising**

*(How to organize a committee, the event, publicity and more)*

Hazzan Rebecca Carmi (Beachwood, OH)

Hudson Three

**11:30 am Keynote: On Being A Good Person**

**In A Complicated World – Text Study and Discussion**

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

Chair: Hazzan Henry Rosenblum, *Dean, H. L. Miller Cantorial School (New York, NY)*

Ballroom A

**12:45 pm Lunch**

Lunch for Miller School Alumni

Ballroom C

Lunch with Rabbi Telushkin for those interested in publishing and Jewish literacy (*at his table*)

Ballroom B

Lunch with Rabbi Artson

Orange

**2:00 pm Multiple Tracks Session Three:**

**A) Cantorial Track, *New Music For Yom Kippur***

Hazzan Sol Zim (Hollis Hills, NY)

Empire

**B) Chaplaincy Track, *End of Life Issues***

Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL)

Columbia

**C) Educational Track-4Mat**

Dr. Cindy Dolgin (New York, NY) and

Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Jericho, NY)

Hudson One

**D) Spirituality Track**

Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA) and

Rabbi Stephen Robbins

Hudson Three

**E) Technology, *Creating CDs, MP3s and Exciting Recordings***

Hazzan David Propis (Houston, TX)

Dutchess

**3:30 pm Choral Rehearsal**

Conductor: Hazzan Jeremy Lipton (Los Angeles, CA)

Columbia

**Band Rehearsal**

Director: Hazzan Kenneth Richmond (Natick, MA)

Manhattan

**Dance Rehearsal**

Director: Hazzan Heather Batchelor (Port Chester, NY)

Ulster

CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18TH  
(continued)

Individual Coachings	Rooms TBA
Membership Interviews	Hudson Two
5:00 pm Free Time, Individual Rehearsals, Individual Coachings	Rooms TBA
or Yoga and Mincha Meditations: (see Tuesday, 7:00 am)	Ulster
6:00 pm Hors d'oeuvres / Cocktail Hour	Lobby
6:45 pm Dinner	Ballrooms B-C
<b>ברכת המזון:</b> Hazzan Howard Dardashti (Boynton Beach, FL) Chair: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)	
<b>Kavod Award:</b> Rabbi Morton Leifman, Jewish Theological Seminary	
<b>הבה נשיר:</b> Chassidic Song Festival Favorites – West Coast Region	
8:00 pm	Ballroom A
<b>מנחה:</b> Hazzan Alan Sokoloff (Mamaroneck, NY)	
<b>מעריב:</b> Celebrating Twenty Years of Women Graduates of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School	
Chair: Hazzan Joanna Dulkin (St. Louis, MO)	
Hazzanim Laura Berman (Westport, CT), Caitlin Bromberg (Albuquerque, NM), Carol Chesler (Huntington, NY), Avima Rudavsky Darnov (Marlboro, NJ), Elisheva Dienstfrey (Alexandria, VA), Estelle Epstein (Teaneck, NJ), Michelle Freedman (Ridgewood, NJ), Jenna Beth Greenberg (Washington, DC), Amy Pearlman Kanarak (Dobbs Ferry, NY), Paula Pepperstone (Louisville, KY), Wendi Portman (Silver Spring, MD), Marina Shemesh (Worcester, MA), Stacy Joy Sokol (East Rockaway, NY), Elizabeth Stevens (New York, NY), Marcey Wagner (Jericho, NY)	
9:00 pm Concert: Israel @ 60	Manhattan
Including Convention Band, Chorus and Dancers and sing-alongs for entire audience	
Chair: Hazzan Ilan Mamber (Wyckoff, NJ)	
Choir Director: Hazzan Jeremy Lipton (Los Angeles, CA)	
Band Director: Hazzan Kenneth Richmond (Natick, MA)	
Dance Director: Hazzan Heather Batchelor (Port Chester, NY)	
Hazzanim: Ofer Barnoy (Roslyn, NY), Aaron Bensoussan (North York, CAN), Josef Chazan (Mission Viejo, CA) Estelle Epstein (Teaneck, NJ), Raphael Frieder (Great Neck, NY), Benjamin Maissner (Toronto, CAN), Ilan Mamber (Wyckoff, NJ), Israel Singer (Closter, NJ) and others	
11:00 pm C.A. "Idol" Contest	Empire
Master of Ceremonies: Hazzan James Gloth as Ryan Seacrest	
Judges: Hazzanim: Alan Sokoloff as Randi, Marcey Wagner as Paula and Simon Spiro as Simon.	
<i>At the end of the evening the audience will vote and the winner will receive a grand prize.</i>	



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**CELEBRATING ISRAEL@60**  
**THURSDAY, JUNE 19TH**

7:00 am	Columbia
שחרית: Hazzan David Katcher (Philadelphia, PA)	
בעל קריאה: Yitzhak Ben Moshe (CICA-Jacksonville, FL)	
Gabbai: Hazzan Daniel Green (Toms River, NJ)	
Divar Torah: Hazzan Benjamin Maissner (Toronto, Canada)	
7:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast	Ballrooms B-C
8:00 am – Executive Council Breakfast	Ballroom A
9:00 am – Noon Cyber Café drinks, snacks, free computer use	Library
<b>Vendors:</b> Shop with our convention vendors at your leisure for music, Jewish art, tallitot, software, books and Judaica	Lobby
9:00 am FILM: My Name Is Moshe: The life of Hazzan Moshe Nathanson <sup>77</sup> Producer: Sheldon Feinberg (CICA-Port Royal, SC)	Empire
9:00 am Executive Council Meeting	Ballroom A
10:30 am Teaching B'nai Mitzvah Students with Learning Issues Hazzan Marcia Lane (Deal, NJ) and Dr. Howard Blas, Director Tikvah Program, Camp Ramah – New England	Dutchess
Check Out by 12:30 pm	
Noon – 1:00 pm Lunch	Tent

**NEXT YEAR**  
**IN JERUSALEM**  
*(and Eastern Europe)*  
**June 28 – July 12, 2009**

## The David J. Puttermann Award for Lifetime Achievement

Honoree: *Hazzan Saul Z. Hammerman*

Presenter: *Hazzan Robert Kieval*

*Hazzan Robert Kieval:*

I am standing before you this evening in dual capacities as both presenter of the David J. Puttermann Award for Lifetime Achievement and accepter of that award on behalf of Hazzan Saul Z. Hammerman who, unfortunately, was unable to make the long trip to the Convention to accept this prestigious award.

My relationship with Saul goes back long before I was born. Saul, at age 12 in 1938, sang as a soloist in Nadler's choir for the High Holidays in the Bronx. The hazzan was William Sauler (as some of you know, later to become my father-in-law), who had just arrived that summer from Berlin. Isn't Jewish geography a blast!?

Saul's career began at the age of 8, singing in the Yiddish Theater while simultaneously singing as soloist in choirs with some of the great hazzanim of the Golden Age. His love and connection to hazzanut were not surprising as he grew up first in East New York and then in Boro Park, both incredibly fertile grounds for hazzanut in the 20s, 30s and 40s.

When Saul was in his 20s, he was called to the pulpit of the newly formed Beth El Congregation in Baltimore. He served them with dedication, enthusiasm and abounding talent for 45 years helping them to grow musically and artistically, through his innovative programming into one of the most prestigious Conservative synagogues in the United States.

His two very talented and devoted older brothers, Hayyim and Michal, also prodded Saul on to achieve success in this chosen family business.

Saul's dedication to his calling is exemplified by his taking on leadership roles in the profession, founding first the Cantors Association of Baltimore and then the Seaboard Region of the Cantors Assembly. He has served the Cantors Assembly faithfully and well as fundraiser, Board Member and Officer culminating in his serving as President from 1985-1987, following in the footsteps of his older brother, Michal ב"ר, who had served as President 10 years earlier.

I hope you will allow me a personal moment (not that you have a choice). When I came to B'nai Israel in 1977, Saul was one of the first people to call and welcome me to the area. During the ensuing years he has been, and remains, a constant mentor and devoted friend, especially during my prolonged illness, and for that I will be eternally in his debt.



It is with great honor and pleasure that I present you with the Putterman Award for 2008.

I now accept this award on behalf of Saul, his wife Aileen who was not only his *ezer k'negdo* but also his artistic partner, his children Jan and Susan, Rochelle and Richard Samuel and Renee without whose love and devotion he could never have accomplished the myriad of things that were so important to his service of HaShem, the Jewish Community and the Cantors Assembly. I do so with great appreciation for the love, honor and respect that you — his colleagues — have shown him not only this evening, but through the countless years that lead to it as well.

Thank you all!

## The Moses Silverman Award for Service

Honoree: *Hazzan Stephen J. Stein*

Presenter: *Hazzan Mimi Haselkorn*

*Hazzan Mimi Haselkorn:*

Good Evening. It's an honor and a privilege to present the Moses Silverman Award for Service to the Cantors Assembly to our esteemed Executive Vice President, Stephen J. Stein. Mo Silverman served as a Cantors Assembly President, and as you read in your program, he was well known for his warm personality and seeing to the financial well-being and health of the Cantors Assembly.

Steve Stein most definitely exemplifies devoted service to our organization and is very well deserving of this award. As Executive Vice President, Steve is on call 24/7. This is, of course, in addition to serving his synagogue. To say that Steve is hard working, dedicated and diligent is an understatement. Whether it's forging the way to improved relations with the arms of the Conservative Movement, meeting with CA officers and the membership at large, Steve is always there. I know I cannot recall a time when I didn't receive a returned call or an e-mail within 24 hours. When Steve had surgery recently, he was still working tirelessly for the Cantors Assembly. To borrow a phrase from Proverbs, "*Im ein K'nesset HaHazzanim, ein Steve Stein, Im ein Steve Stein, ein K'nesset HaHazzanim.*"

Steve, Mazal Tov on your 10 years as our Executive Vice President and in receiving this prestigious award. You are truly a *mentsch* and embody *rachamim*. May you be blessed with *chesed*, may you be blessed with *rachamim*, may you be blessed with *simchah*, and may you be blessed with *shalom*.

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## The Ideal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Synagogue

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein, Chair*

*Dr. Steven Epstein, Dr. Raymond Goldstein, Rabbi Joel Meyers, Rabbi Charles Simon, Mrs. Cory Schneider*

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

Welcome. So much has been written and said in recent years about the Conservative movement. Regrettably, much of that content has been negative. For those of us who are passionate about the objectives of our movement, this has been disheartening. Yet, the solution is not to dwell incessantly on the problems, but rather to seek solutions. The challenge is to get our message across, to do a better job of communicating, particular to those under 40, why Conservative Judaism is a practical and meaningful approach for most Jews living in a modern society. What is more important is that we need an agenda and programming that is appealing.

The title of this morning's session is, "The Ideal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Synagogue." Our distinguished panel consists of leaders within our movement. They are, and I will introduce them alphabetically, Dr. Steven Epstein, a past president of Beth Yeshurun Congregation in Houston, TX, Dr. Raymond Goldstein, president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Joel Meyers, Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs and Mrs. Cory Schneider, president of Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

I have asked each of our panelists to speak about not only about what the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> Century synagogue should look like, but also the steps that would need to be taken to move us from where we are to where we want to go.

Each of our panelists has been asked to speak for approximately 10 minutes, which should leave us with a reasonable amount of time for your questions and discussion.

*Dr. Raymond Goldstein:*

I live in Rochester, Minnesota, and I belong to three congregations: one in Mendota Heights, Minnesota; the second in La Crosse, Wisconsin; and the third in Omaha, Nebraska. I *daven* regularly at each of them. But I grew up in New York City.

As we talk about the future, we must pay attention to the echoes from our past. Sometimes we have to think about the past to make decisions about the future.

I was thinking about the congregation where I grew up and the ways in which it is different from the congregations I belong to today. The services themselves essentially have not changed, although some of the melodies may be different and the length of the service may have been tweaked. The *klei kodesh* at that time were involved in every aspect of congregational life. The rabbi and the cantor served as the head of the synagogue school, and they also taught in the school. They functioned as youth directors, office staff, and did whatever needed to be done. The lay leadership was not very well educated Judaically, and children and teens were sort of involved. This was at the beginning of USY. This was at the beginning of Conservative day schools.

Today our congregations are different. We enjoy the great success in training our young people. We have provided them with the opportunity to learn and to be empowered at USY, Ramah and Schechter schools, and some of them have had the opportunity to learn and grow at the Conservative Yeshiva.

The purpose of the Conservative Yeshiva was to produce a better-educated lay leadership. We give the people who study there the opportunity to lead and we instill in them the ability to do so. We give them community, and we define that community according to the rules of Conservative Judaism. The people who attend USY events go on Nativ and study at the Conservative Yeshiva understand why they are there and with the definitions, glories, and boundaries of Conservative Judaism. They know what it means to be part of that defined Conservative community. Then they return to their synagogues, which are not much different from the synagogue where I grew up in the 1950s.

When they return home, these young adults are excited about living Jewish lives and performing *mitzvot*, but they find that often there is no place for them in our *k'hillot*. Our *k'hillot* do not define themselves carefully, using the rules of Conservative Judaism. They do not set a *brit* between the synagogue and the membership. We certainly tell prospective members about their dues obligations and we let them know what the building fund assessment is, along with any other financial expectations, and we also let them know that they are part of the community, but we do not tell them the

behavior we expect from them.

So our children return to the *k'hillot* where they grew up, where all too often the lay leaders and congregants do not practice Conservative Judaism as they do. These young adults have been empowered to lead and to study but they find that there is no place for them. They seek other institutions — and they find them. The members of post-denominational *minyanim* are the children of our movement. They are finding places for themselves outside our *k'hillot*. If our congregations are to succeed, we must recognize what we have done. We planted seeds and they have grown and flourished. Now we must prepare a place where these seedlings can be transplanted so they can continue to grow. We must make a place for them in our congregations. We must not just make them feel welcome — although we must make them feel welcome — we must also let them know that those things that we have taught them to do and to be and to believe have a place in our communities.

Often there is some tension between these young people and the old guard at our *k'hillot* because these older people, who provide the resources for our *k'hillot*, have not been as well educated as our children.

So what of the future? The Cantorate has the opportunity to play a vital role in shaping the future of our *k'hillot*. You have the opportunity to mentor and to empower and to lead the lay leadership, to teach them not just that it is good to hear melodies but how to feel those melodies. You can teach them to *daven*. To do this you need the support of rabbis and lay leaders in your congregations. There must be a partnership among the *klei kodesh*, other professionals and the laity. I fear the laity will be the most resistant to this partnership, but we need lay leaders who are willing to take risks along with you.

When I speak with the USY'ers each year at their convention, I tell them to go home and shake up the leaders of their *k'hillot* — their cantors, their rabbis, their congregational presidents. I tell them that there is a place for them, and if there is not they must make that place for themselves. I urge them that if their congregations have no youth commission, youth director, or youth adviser, they should ask why. Often it has seemed to synagogue leaders that it is relatively easy to cut a budget by eliminating those positions, but if we don't invest in our young people and make a place for them we are doomed as a movement.

In the future, the leaders of our *k'hillot* must respond to our young

people, empower them as they grow, and make sure that there are meaningful boundaries around the *k'hillot* that make it a Conservative institution. They must let the people who join the community know what it means to be a member of that Conservative congregation. They must make clear that there are standards.

We must welcome people where they are but the bar must not be set where they can grasp it too easily. They must reach for it. It is up to all of us, professionals and laity together, to shape work together to set that bar.

We have a lot of work to do. I know that if we work together, we can make it happen.

*Rabbi Joel Meyers:*

*Boker Tov!* I am delighted to be with you, my colleagues, our Hazzanim, this morning and to be participating in this discussion about the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> Century synagogue.

Having been a rabbi now for more than 40 years and a *shul* goer even longer, I can think of no other period than the one we are in when there has been so much synagogue experimentation going on. Everywhere we look, we find innovative ideas being tried out: multiple *minyanim* on Shabbat morning encompassing learning services, meditation services, family services, healing services — and fast services: no rabbi and no hazzan; contemporary music composed for the service; discussions replacing sermons; midrashic-style story telling; Synaplex — multiple activities on a Shabbat morning; Synagogue 3000 (formerly 2000), to help synagogues become inclusive and welcoming; and all types of post ordination seminars for rabbis and cantors to help them become better religious leaders. And we are urged to emulate models from evangelical mega-churches of divine religious programs which bring in masses of churchgoers each week. Finally, just consider the ease of manipulating prayers on our computers. Everyone can write his own prayer or change the fixed liturgy with a keystroke.

Everyone is on the hunt to find the formula which will result in the perfect synagogue. An impossibility of course, because (1) we are such a diverse Jewish community and our relationship to the synagogue is so varied and so dependent upon our own relationship to Judaism and to the stage of life we are in; (2) the twin goals of providing both a community, a *k'hillah k'doshah*, while meeting individual desires can never be achieved; and (3) any synagogue is and will remain inadequately funded in order to achieve all

the tasks expected of it.

So while I believe it is not possible to speak of an ideal model, I will describe what would be the characteristics of my ideal 21<sup>st</sup> Century synagogue, my ideal synagogue in any century. I do so from the perspective of a congregant, not from the perspective of being a rabbi or of my position as Executive of the RA. Although I did serve as a congregational rabbi for 15 years and in my current position have visited hundreds of synagogues, I have been a congregant for close to 30 years now, a member, with my family, in three quite different but absolutely wonderful Conservative synagogues. It is from this perspective, then, that I wish to speak this morning.

The grounding for my comments is based upon one of the foundational triads set down by our Sages — *Torah, Avodah, Ug'milut Hasadim*. And Prof. Neil Gillman, in a nice turn of phrase, perhaps with this triad in mind, has written that “Judaism provides three models of how to be an authentic religious Jew, three answers to the question: ‘What does God demand of me above all?’ The three models are the behavioral (God demands that we do certain things), the intellectual (God demands study), and the spiritual (God demands passion). Our synagogues must provide settings for the expression of all three.”

For me, first, the ideal synagogue is one immersed in *G'milut Hasadim*, that is it is an involved, caring community. To achieve this requires incredible effort on the part of klei kodesh and synagogue leadership. The synagogue is to be a community of Jews who go out of their way to make certain that every member recognizes and knows every other member. We all have a great need to be part of a group that cares about us. My ideal synagogue would make that possible. So for example, if I could, every man, woman and child would have a Velcro name tag — Joel Meyers — that would be worn on the property. In a large synagogue you wouldn’t have to guess to whom you are talking. Every month, all birthdays would be recognized; all anniversaries would be recognized. There would be a way for age cohorts to meet — families with young children, empty-nesters, and so forth.

But this is only part of building a caring community. There would be a *hevrah kaddisha, bikkur holim*, babysitting, a ride to the doctor group, and a supermarket group. There would be opportunities for meals together in small groups. And there would be projects which brought congregants into the wider community. All would be to enable a religious community to be

felt by all.

To accomplish this, the synagogue would need additional professional help to work with synagogue members — not necessarily rabbis or cantors, but Jewish communal workers who are committed to building community.

The second base upon which the ideal synagogue would be built is *Torah*. This sacred community we are building would have to devote time to study. I believe that our congregants do want to grow in knowledge, but really do not know how and are put off from trying. So I would develop study groups, three or four people who agree to study together. We would work out a curriculum and home study groups going in my community. I believe congregants would respond magnificently to this opportunity. The rabbi, the cantor, the educators could all be resources to help move the study groups found. Once a year there would be a communal siyyum to celebrate our learning and to strengthen the commitment to continued study.

There would be exceptional teachers and experiential opportunities for youngsters and teenagers, and I would hope a central center which brought teenagers and young adults together. There would be learning opportunities for preschoolers and parents of preschoolers, as well as learning opportunities for parents to complement the religious school curriculum.

Again, most educational and youth programs are afterthoughts in our congregations. They should be primary expenditure centers and well-funded.

And the third base could be *Avodah* — prayer. Actually, *Avodah* is a good word for this, because as we know prayer does take work and today's world with its ability to provide instantaneous answers and entertainment does not readily lead itself to the definite pace needed to attain prayerful fulfillment.

In my ideal praying synagogue there would be one service to which everyone comes. Why? Because we are all participants in a community. We know one another. We share the joy of the *aufruf* or the Bar Mitzvah. *T'fillot* are sung or chanted aloud to participating melodies, engaging and easy to grasp. The congregation would have large screen transliteration going as well as classes to bring congregants up to the same level. Chanting together would help that. Attention would be paid to the flow of the service and the timing of the service realizing that we all participate in an amazing drama

whether Shabbat morning or daily *minyan*. There are separate services for teenagers and an exceptional junior congregation, but all children would still join their parents in the main service. The role of the hazzan, is essential. In addition to leading the *t'fillot* and helping train *sh'lachei tsibbur*, the hazzan is also a teacher and therefore at least once a month, the hazzan would be teaching the congregation about the music of the service. What was the composer trying to achieve, and why? How do the music and the message reinforce each other? How do we keep traditional *nusah* alive and yet be open to the music which engages and uplifts today? Again, I put *Avodah* last because I believe if we create a real community of caring, learning Jews, prayer will emanate from these in a captivating, involved, spiritually uplifting style.

In sum, my ideal synagogue does not necessarily have something for everyone, nor should it. It is a simple model. My ideal synagogue is a caring, involved, religious community dedicated to acts of caring and kindness involving all; dedicating to learning, involving all; dedicated to connecting to God through prayer as one.

*Mrs. Cory Schneider:*

There is a great cartoon sequence in “Alice in Wonderland” when Alice asks: “Would you tell me please, which way I should go from here?” The Cat replies, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” “Don’t much care where,” says Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” replies the Cat.

To ensure our future, we need to figure out where we want to go so that we can map out which way to go. As I look at the Conservative synagogue of the future, my hope is that we have synagogues that are full to overflowing with engaged and knowledgeable Conservative Jews of all ages, gender and family-constellations. The *way* to get there is by focusing on the development of community, being relevant, and involving our members.

Albert L. Winseman, Global Practice Leader for Faith Communities for Gallup, writes in his book, “Growing an Engaged Church,” many clergy assume that spiritual belief leads to belonging, and that people who have a commitment to God want to be part of a church or faith community. Rather, he suggests, it is quite the opposite. Belonging leads to believing. Research indicates that people who first develop a strong sense of engagement in a congregation go on to develop a strong faith and spiritual commitment as

well. Humans are social beings. We seek a common purpose and meaning in groups to engage our emotional cores and expand our intellects. I think that the synagogue of the future will be shaped by this focus on social interaction.

The key is in building community, reaching out to members wherever we find them, and then providing them with an environment that will nurture and support them in their quest to belong. The synagogue should be the place where they feel accepted and needed, where they are intellectually stimulated, and are religiously and spiritually engaged.

Hopefully, the synagogue of 2020, will focus its energies on this agenda of engagement. But to engage people, we must first meet them where they are. Perhaps some education programs (including religious school) might take place in cyber classrooms. Educational efforts should focus on creating, maintaining and nourishing a knowledgeable and skilled laity committed to ongoing Jewish study and prayer, beginning with the children who we hope will continue our traditions.

Programming will be targeted toward special interest and lifestyle groups: singles, divorced, interfaith couples, Jews by Choice, blended families, widowed, retired, specific professions and avocations, those interested in social justice, ecology and public policy as expressions of the observance of *mitzvot*. We will value quality more than quantity.

Our women's groups will engage the individual woman within the congregation with women-to-women programming, projects, study, and prayer. There is a great need for women to have a place to interact with other women and to relate their shared experiences.

With this model we will reach out to and engage Conservative Jews where they are at. Develop their sense of belonging and as that feeling builds, bring them, corral them, into the centralized organization, the synagogue. And, of course, that means that the core must be vibrant and meaningful. We must provide substance and opportunities for personal growth as Jews.

Our priorities will remain the same — education, observance of *mitzvot*, *t'fillah* and increasing the relevance of Conservative/Masorti Judaism for each of our members. But the ways we accomplish this will be different as we reach out to each of our members. A shift must occur as we involve our members and deepen their commitment and observance within communities that are welcoming, nurturing and relevant. How we do this

will be through a partnership of our professional and lay leadership. For only in that way, can we be assured of a viable synagogue in 2020.

*Dr. Stephen Epstein:*

Good morning. I want to thank Hazzan Propis and the Cantors Assembly for inviting me to take part in this panel today. My name is Steven Epstein, and I was president of Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston, Texas 14 years ago. For those of you who are not familiar with Beth Yeshurun, it is the largest Conservative synagogue in the United States — in North America, even. It has more than 2300 families.

What is an ideal Conservative synagogue? I would like to share with you some of the reasons why I feel Beth Yeshurun is an example and will continue to be such a vibrant, innovative, and successful place of worship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

First, and probably the foremost reason for our synagogue's success, is the wonderful working relationship we have between the clergy. This all started with our senior rabbi, Rabbi Jack Siegel, more than 43 years ago. Rabbi Siegel celebrated 31 years with the congregation before he retired in 1996 and became Rabbi Emeritus. Rabbi David Rosen, who was the senior rabbi at a synagogue in Rhode Island, became the new senior rabbi. The legacy and mentoring of Rabbi Siegel were and still are an inspiration to Rabbi Rosen and the respect, graciousness and understanding exuded by Rabbi Rosen for Rabbi Siegel as the emeritus is to be emulated. The mutual respect and friendship that Rabbi Rosen shares with Hazzan Propis are also to be admired. They work together and support each other not only on the *bimah* but with the various responsibilities within the synagogue. Each week, on Tuesday morning, they have staff meetings which include the rabbi, the associate and assistant rabbis, Hazzan Propis and the executive director to discuss and plan for not only the week's events but any future and upcoming long-range plans. I have to say that it has been this cohesiveness, this unified message, this one voice, that has made our congregation grow from strength to greater strength.

Second, we are not just a one-dimensional congregation. To be able to satisfy more than 2300 families, a synagogue must be diversified. Our synagogue provides a wide range of services and programs to meet the various needs of the individual congregants. For example, on any given Shabbat, we provide four different Saturday morning services.

We have the traditional chapel service in our intimate, 210-seat Greenfield Chapel. We also have what we call the “Museum Menu.” That is an egalitarian service that allows women to participate and is also a more traditional service. We also have Junior Congregation which is a Saturday morning *Shabbat* service for families with elementary school-aged children. It provides a nurturing environment for the children to gain skills necessary to participate in and lead services. The Bard Sanctuary is the main sanctuary of the synagogue. It is used weekly for B’nai Mitzvah celebrations which we have almost every weekend of the year. It is used throughout the year for large weddings, holidays and special events.

During my presidency, Hazzan Propis approached me to form the High Club for the Cultural Arts. He and I share a common goal. We wanted our congregants to have a good feeling about synagogue life. I have to tell you that this was probably one of the greatest programs that we created for Beth Yeshurun. Not only do we bring quality musical events, but the excitement, good will and the positive feelings that these concerts brought to the congregation were immeasurable. Since its inception 14 years ago, we have raised more than one-and-a-half million dollars. The High Club is responsible for raising monies to fund special events without tapping into the synagogue’s budget. We actually raised enough money from one of our “Three Cantors” concerts to fund for our Rabbi Emeritus’ retirement. The High Club plans and presents approximately three-to-four programs per year. The underwriting for these programs was created at different levels of giving — \$180 to \$5000. This has enabled our congregation to bring many outstanding concerts, guest cantors and choirs to perform for our congregants and the entire Houston Jewish community at large.

Let me set the stage. It’s the year 1999, December 31, the New Year’s Eve is a Friday night, the last night before the turn of the century — the 21<sup>st</sup> Century — and the beginning of the year 2000. The president of the synagogue challenged both Rabbi Rosen and Hazzan Propis to create a special Friday night service for our congregants. Thus, Friday Night Alive began for our synagogue as a unique service made up of a variety of musical instruments including keyboards, world percussion, guitars, etc., performed with a variety of beautiful prayers and tunes which included arrangements from Debbie Friedman and Meir Finkelstein. The result was that the synagogue had attracted approximately 1600 people to attend Friday night services before they celebrated and brought in the New Year. Some people

were dressed in tuxedos and ball gowns mixed with those wearing simple attire. The service began at 6:00 P.M., lasted only one hour and was a wonderful and lively way to begin the Shabbat and start the New Year. Now it has become a staple within the synagogue and everyone looks forward to the first Friday night of each month, as this is the night dedicated to Friday Night Alive. It's a wonderful way to start the Shabbat and to cultivate all ages from the very young to the elders.

Another very innovative program that was recently instituted at Beth Yeshurun was the Rabbi's Circle. This was formed to bring keynote speakers to our congregation to address relevant topics and current events. For example, this year's topic was the 2008 election. The title was "The Right, The Left and Center." Our speakers were Alan Dershowitz, Dennis Prager and Jeff Greenfield. This program was gifted by 17 families which formulate the Rabbi's Circle and was open to not only our congregation, but the entire community free of charge. It was held at our synagogue and was a highly successful event.

Third, it's important to provide the proper facility to house all of the various services and programs that the synagogue provides. In 1992, we had just finished a massive renovation of our school, which provides not only a religious school, but an affiliate Solomon Schechter Jewish Day School to grade five. In 1994, when I was president, I realized that our congregation had been at its present location for more than 35 years. With our synagogue budget tripling over these several years, it became necessary to renovate and enlarge the business wing. We now had more staff, assistant rabbis, etc., and if you remember, everyone was talking about the year 2000 and Y2K. We initiated a campaign and called it "Beth Yeshurun 2000." The goal was by the year 2000 we would be ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and we would be proactive rather than retroactive. We would provide our next generation of congregants with a facility that would meet the demands and expectations they would need for the next 35 years. We added 17,000 square feet that included our now 450-seat Friedman-Leavitt Sanctuary with two expansion wings to seat another 400 people. The sanctuary is now used on most Friday nights as well as for weddings, funerals, concerts, and other synagogue events.

Fourth, I feel that it is very important to provide customer service, even at a synagogue. I'm sure all of you are aware of the hotel chain, the Ritz-Carlton. They are known as a five-star hotel that provides outstanding

customer service. They pride themselves on the fact that their guests repeatedly stay at their properties because they are treated like royalty. The employees of the Ritz-Carlton take a two-day course when they are hired on how to provide the most outstanding customer service. They are presented with the Ritz-Carlton credo which states the 12 service values that the company strives for. I hired the manager of the Ritz-Carlton to come to our synagogue to address every employee, from our teachers to the custodians to the rabbis and cantor. If large corporations take the time and effort to teach their employees and staff good service and communication skills, then why not provide the opportunity for synagogue staff to also receive training in dealing with our congregants?

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of thinking outside the box. I remember when Hazzan Propis had the idea of “The Three Cantors.” I loved the idea, since everyone had already heard of “The Three Tenors.” This was an easy concept that people could identify with. However, to David Propis’ credit, he said to me that he wanted this to be more than just a concert in the synagogue, as we had done in the past, but to involve a well-known conductor, Mati Lazar, along with our very own Houston Symphony and to perform the event in the finest Houston concert hall, the Wortham Theater. We had two successful “Three Cantors” concerts that raised enormous amounts of funds. In fact, five years later, we put the concert on again with the Houston Symphony and this time I suggested that we needed even a bigger draw since we had already done this twice in the community. And sure enough, we were able to bring in Marvin Hamlisch who conducted the three cantors and performed as well.

These are just some of the ideas that I wanted to share with you this morning. I can only conclude that you, as cantors, play a key role in the success of our synagogues in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because we, as congregants, are inspired by your melodies and ideas that each of you brings to our synagogues that make them not only a place of prayer, but also a place of inspiration. Thank you.

*Rabbi Charles Simon:*

When speaking to you, I’m speaking to musicians, artists and spiritual leaders. In order for us to address the topic of the morning, I think it’s important that we begin by understanding who our membership really is and what the implications of that can be and will be in the future. So let

me just give you some statistics. We're an aging movement and we're having fewer children. We're not reproducing ourselves. Instead of having 2.2 children per couple, we're having 1.8. Our children are marrying later. *They're* having fewer children. Not all of our children are marrying. As a matter of fact, if we took 100 children in our congregations, maybe only 65 to 70% of them are actually marrying in a traditional sense. A certain percentage of them are partnering, some others are just committed singles, a number of people are increasingly living in these kinds of group homes like the "Friends" television show. And we don't know what's going to happen to them. Of these 65% who actually do marry, a significant percentage of them choose — or maybe they don't choose — maybe glandularly they choose not to marry Jewish. And it doesn't matter if it's 30% or 40% or 50%, if you look at the numbers, it's a significant percentage considering the fact that we're not growing and they're not having three children, they're having one child or one-and-a-half child, one-and-a-third children. And, of those children who do choose to marry Jewish and have children, we don't know what's going to happen to them. Right now we have *two generations* of this 20 to 35 post college group of people, and we really don't know what's going to happen with them. They're marrying much later. We don't know if, when they marry, they are going to become like their parents, like us, and join *shuls*, or are they not, because the playing field has changed.

Let me just give you another example of how the playing field has changed. I happen to check *tefillin* for the worldwide RAC and for the Men's Club. I was down on the Lower East Side working with some scribes not too long ago and the scribes showed me a set of blue *tefillin*. Now, if you remember studying *tefillin*, you realize that *tefillin* can't be blue. They must be leather and they must be black. But somebody is making blue *tefillin*, so I asked the scribe, I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I tried to find out from the person who brought these *tefillin* in to correct where he got them, and he wouldn't tell me." It really wasn't that important that he wouldn't tell him, what was important was that someone was making blue *tefillin* and this is indicative of the fact that there are no rules anymore.

The world has changed dramatically from the world of "tradition." And because there are no rules, everything is kind of breaking down in a lot of ways. It's not necessarily working. And here we are — here you are — trying to teach *nusach*, to teach traditional ways and traditional community values to a world that is moving in diametrically opposite directions. And so what

does that mean? That's where we are, where we are now. And the challenge is how do we get from what the reality is to what we hope it's going to be in the future?

Now, a lot of our hopes are really very similar. We want to build communities. All of us want to build communities. We want to involve our members and our potential members more actively in meaningful Jewish lives, we want them to understand the responsibility they have with one another, with their families, with their communities, with the world at large.

And so I understood this topic a bit differently. I understood it in the sense that it raised the question for me of what role do you have to play in this changing new world. We need you to teach these people to sing and to dance and to study and to pray, and we need you to teach them how to behave, which means we need you to model for us in a lot of different ways, and we need you to think, as it has been said before, outside of the box, recognizing the fact that the normative standards aren't always working. Now, these normative standards are always going to work for some people, but if we allow ourselves — if you allow yourself — to be boxed in, to be limited in terms of how you are perceived, you're never going to be able to reach out to our children and our grandchildren and those people we want to bring closer to our way of life, to *m'kareiv otam*, to bring them closer. And, so we need you to abandon fixed roles as just a hazzan and we need to see you establish yourselves more firmly as spiritual figures in our communities. We need you to guide and we really need you to lead and if you do, this will result in an ideal synagogue in the future. Thank you.

## Keynote: Reaching Every Jew Through Music

*Debbie Friedman*

You cannot imagine what an honor this is and how incredible it is to be standing here before you to give this keynote. So it was three weeks ago that I found out that I was doing this and it was quite the surprise.

I thought to myself what could I possibly tell you? So I did some soul-searching and I decided that people have some misconceptions about who I am, what I do, what I did. People have all kinds of stories about me. I thought maybe I would set the record straight and then tell you some truths about how I feel and how I perceive you. And then you hear it straight from me and not through the rumor mill. Now if you have any questions or any comments, keep them to yourself.

I need to tell you a little bit about my background so you'll see where the music comes from. I was born in Utica, New York on February 23, 1951. I'll give you a second to do the math. I was born in St. Elizabeth's Hospital where my mother remained for a week, and the bill was \$52. I was born into a family already consisting of two older sisters, and my Bubbe and Zayde lived upstairs and all but one of my maternal aunts and uncles lived in the Utica area. The area is known for lead in the water and the infestation of Mafia. We were surrounded by family, none of whom was in the mafia and none of them, as far as I knew, was affected by the lead in the water. And neither of these issues were reasons for us to have left Utica.

My father's side of the family, on the other hand, was from New York City. They lived in the Bronx and were much more formal than my mother's family. We were not lacking any family connection. We shared all of our holidays together until I was five years old. Until my father, drowning in family, dragged us to the tundra of Minnesota. He needed to get away from New York. He wanted to be as far away from family as he could, as far away from all the relatives and our Jewish lives so he could have some peace and quiet. He wanted to escape from the yokes of family and tradition and responsibility. He wanted my mother's undivided attention and didn't want to be a butcher anymore. He thought that by going west, he would be able to start a business, have a new, liberated life without family breathing down his neck and he'd make a lot of money. In his mind, that was what being a successful man meant. So we moved to St. Paul where I was forced to repeat a half-year of kindergarten because the school system worked differently in the Midwest than in New York. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment and it wasn't long after we got to St. Paul that I celebrated my sixth birthday.

Shortly after that my sisters found a book under the seat of the car called "Expectant Motherhood." Of course, I was too young to understand what that meant until someone translated it for me. But my two sisters, one nine and the other 12, understood what was happening and knew that by March of the year to come we would have another member of the family. All of us wished for a boy because my father made it very clear to us in a myriad of ways that he wanted a boy. And we all wanted to make my father happy. Mom had a maternity outfit that was muted stripes, shades of brown. And we three girls sat with her on the airplane from St. Paul to Utica and used her outfit as a palette for the colors we wanted his eyes and hair to be. We were certain it was going to be a boy and we chose his name, and his name was going to be for my Zayde in the Bronx, Morris Aaron. And Marc Aaron would be his name — Marc with a "c," of course. The big day came, and dad woke me up and said, "You have a little brother." I was very excited. I was excited not only to have a little brother, but on that day, it had only been one week since my seventh birthday had passed and I hadn't yet received all of my gifts. I was waiting for the one gift I wanted the most — a cash register. That morning after daddy told me about the baby, he pointed to the dresser and he said, "Look over there." And there it was. Shiny and new and filled with buttons that I could use as play money. My cash register. I'm not sure of the significance of the cash register. My hunch is that it had something to do with claiming my worth in the face of this displacement. Frankly, in retrospect, I probably wanted to sell my brother back to the hospital from which he would be coming. In truth, the one thing that we all shared in common was that we loved him and thought he was adorable.

Months later, I remember leaving the house to go to school wearing my brand-new dress. Marc — with a "c" — had two teeth. He and the good Bubbe shared that in common. Though, actually, he had two more teeth than she did. Unbeknownst to me, he was holding on to my dress with those two teeth as I walked away to go catch the school bus, and I left with most of my dress, but he had a good bit of it in his mouth. And, how can you get angry with a baby? He was only teething. And, I naturally got into a lot of trouble. It was my fault. How was it that his teeth were in this place and I didn't know it?

It wasn't long after that mom went shopping and took me with her. We went to buy new dishes. I asked her why we were only buying one set of dishes. I asked, "Are these *milchig* or *fleischig*?" And her response was, "We're not going to keep kosher anymore." Well, there I was, seven years old, in the middle of Dayton's Department Store, completely traumatized. In their minds what did I know? Furthermore, what did I care? I begged them not to leave Utica, but it didn't matter. I spoke to them and I asked them for the same things which an

adult might have asked, but they didn't hear me. Or maybe they heard, but they didn't take me seriously. How could we not keep kosher anymore? It did no good to ask.

Little by little, everything that smacked of Utica and family disappeared. We were torn away from everything that was familiar. I personally felt that everything important to me was gone. Once we had shared every *chag*, every Shabbat with family. My father would bring home chicken eggs from the meat market. He'd bring home *fiselach* for the soup. The days of making rugelach and gefilte fish with my good Bubbe were gone — the kind of gefilte fish upon which we didn't choke, not the dry stuff. The days of making *schmaltz* and *grivines* were over with Mom. Going to breakfast every morning with Zayde, sitting on his lap, is gone. Drinking all the leftover wine that was left on the *Seder* table, gone. And watching my sweet Bubbe *bentsch licht* every *Shabbes*, with a napkin on her head, gone. Those days were gone since we moved away. One thing at a time disappeared. But the biggest loss was the family. Once we moved to Minnesota, we found nothing that came close to replacing our family.

Minnesota wasn't a bad place. They had wild rice, cranberries, strangers, a lot of blond hair, smorgasbords, lutefisk, krumkaka, and so many other Scandinavian dishes. We were strangers, strangers. But how could they not keep kosher anymore? This to me was a *shande*, a travesty. There was so little left of our connection in Utica. Oh, how I longed to go back, and how my mother also wanted to go back. And, of course, as my father had failed at every other career he attempted, he was also failing at this new career, and no one was very happy.

I had friends in the neighborhood and at school. Once I was invited to a friend's house for lunch, and her mother put the lunch down on the table. At the tender age of eight, I thought I was going to faint. This lovely Scandinavian friend served me cottage cheese and hot dogs together. I thought I would be sick. Maybe it was a Swedish delicacy. I told them I had to go home right away because I forgot that I had to do something, and of course, everyone understands the intense schedule of a second grader. I quickly ran out of the house because I thought I was going to be sick. Who ever mixed milk and meat together? Okay, maybe a cheeseburger, but cottage cheese and hot dogs?

The one set of dishes my mom bought had a pretty little flower cart and pretty little froo- froo flowers on them. They were dishes that would last forever because they were Melmac, they were plastic. We used them every day. Friday nights were hardly Shabbat anymore. They were mostly just Friday nights. We would make *Kiddush* once in a while. I don't think we made *Motzi*. We didn't make *Motzi* much. Mom lit candles sometimes and I kept waiting to wake up from this nightmare.

Before the birth of the baby, we had moved into the suburbs where we and three other families were the only Jews in the entire community. Where were Bubbe and Zayde? They were back in Utica when it was warm and in the winter months they went to Florida or somewhere else where it was warm to escape the cold. One thing was certain, they weren't with me. I had no alternative. I was stuck there. So in second grade, I asked to go to day school and I got a flat out "no." So even though I was a little too young, I demanded to go to Hebrew school. There were several good reasons, I thought. First, reading right to left was easier for me than reading left to right. Second, I was able to be with all Jewish kids who were almost my own age — a little older. And, finally, I got to sing Hebrew songs all the time and I got to be in the choir in second grade. I felt those were three good reasons to go to Hebrew school. They agreed, and I started to go to Hebrew school four days a week.

It was about four years after we moved to the suburbs that we had to move back to the Jewish section of St. Paul where we had first lived. My oldest sister had been the object of harassment. It was during the time of the Eichmann trial. The news and information that had gotten media play about what had been going on with the Jews in the concentration camps and the description of the war crimes had found its way into the high school where my oldest sister went to school. She was the only Jew in the school and this information had now fallen into the hands of several disturbed students. They knew she was the only Jewish student in the school. They put detailed notes in her locker and in her notebook, in her desks, in all of her classes and then they finally found their way into our home. My parents had to call the ADL because it got so out of hand. If the horror of the Holocaust wasn't enough, these students went beyond and made horrific jokes about the atrocities and tormented her day after day. She had waited some time before telling Mom and Dad, but by the time she finally spoke up it was out of hand. She was gifted and really fragile and well on her way to becoming a concert pianist.

The incident forced my parents to get us out of that environment and into a more Jewish neighborhood. So we went back close to where we started out when we first moved to St. Paul. We came back to Highland Park which was the Jewish part of St. Paul. It didn't matter that my father didn't want to hold onto any of his Jewish traditions. It didn't matter that he wanted to leave his Judaism behind. There would always be those to remind him that he was a Jew, even though he wanted no part of his Jewish roots.

On Shabbat mornings, I used to walk from my house to Junior Congregation. It was about two-and-a-half miles. There was a teacher who I loved whose name was *Mar* Gordon. He called me "Dinaleh." He never raised his

voice at us, his students. We all loved him. He must have stood under five feet tall, and he taught us to *daven*. Every day in Hebrew school we would recite the *Sh'ma* and the *V'ahavta* before class and when we would get to “*v'dibarta bam*,” we would all emphasize the “*bam*” together. We did the same thing every day before we started class — the same way.

He didn't teach us about *kamats katan*, so when I recorded “*L'dor V'dor*” on “Not by Might, Not by Power,” I didn't know that “*godlekha*” was not “*gadlekha*.” I didn't know the proper pronunciation. I used to cringe every time I heard the mistake until thinking about it while preparing these comments when I realized I was thinking of him. And while it is a mistake, the mistake always reminds me of the man who taught me to love *t'fillah*, the man for whom I would walk miles in the cold in order to come to Junior Congregation. I was in grade school and picked myself up and went to Shabbat morning services just because it felt good to be embraced by the *t'fillah* and the communal davening. Trust me — nobody went for the *Kiddush*.

Did I know what I was doing and why I was doing it? Not a clue. I know that I wanted to be connected to *Mar Gordon*. I wanted to be with my friends who were all a little older than I was. Maybe did I know that what I needed was to find a spiritual home? I don't know that I understood then what I was doing was so important to me. At the age of nine, ten and 11, I knew that something was going on. I couldn't identify what it was.

As I grew up and out of Junior Congregation and had to turn to my own congregation to clarify more and more why I do the work I do, I've come to understand that it is our past that directs the way into our internal home. We turn here and stop there and try this and that, but in the final analysis, I think we search for the comfort of what we imagine to be sweet and safe and comfortable in our lives in an effort to recreate that for ourselves and for those who are close to us. If we never experienced what it is that we need, we must allow ourselves to imagine, to dream what we must imagine our best selves to be. We must see our dreams and fantasies as the most real expressions and extensions of ourselves that have come to be in our best moments, and then realize them.

I worked, and because I was earning my own money, I didn't have to ask anyone's permission as to whether I could go to religious school retreats or temple functions and, of course, what parent in their right mind would deprive their child of participating in a synagogue event? From the beginning of junior high school through high school, I worked as a dishwasher and salad lady and cook for Saga Food Service at McAllister College. On the weekends, I was a short-order cook. If the customers were rude or offensive, I put extra mayonnaise

on their hamburgers. I didn't realize that, for some people, it wasn't a punishment. Mayonnaise or not, this was how I earned money to pay for conclaves and youth group events.

When I first got involved with youth group, I was a junior in high school. I had started to play guitar, and was song leading for the youth group. Then I got involved in the region, where my middle sister had been involved, and I rode on her reputation, on her coattails. She was a wonderful person with a great personality, a fantastic sense of humor, and she was the *ruach* chair for the region of the Northern Federation of Temple Youth. She opened the doors for me so that when I first started to sing and play guitar, people were willing to give me a chance. It wasn't long after I began to play that they sent me to Kutz Camp to learn to song lead. It was later on that session that the head song leader got sick and I covered for him. The next year I came back as a song leader at Kutz Camp, the national camp.

I knew I was not going to be able to go to college when I graduated from high school. My father had already told me there was no way he would support me or my education. I knew I had to do something in order to sustain myself, so I decided I would go to Israel to learn Hebrew. I felt if I knew Hebrew, I could teach, I could speak, I could do any number of things. And off I went for six months. I was fluent in three months and returned to America in six months. I began to travel all over the U.S. song leading.

It was in 1971 that the first song came to me, when on a bus on the way to meet my parents, who had driven in from Minnesota. They came to see my grandmother, who professed to be on her deathbed, but who had cooked a six-course dinner, including having made gefilte fish from scratch. Never mind it was dry. The bottom line was that she wanted to see my father and that she pretended she was ill. But she wasn't, in fact. She had made *rogelekh* and *teygelekh* in honor of their trip eastward. She was the Hungarian drama queen who fancied herself of the aristocracy.

Naturally, as time went on, anything that was not strictly Orthodox was not Jewish in her eyes. She didn't understand how much *mentschlichkeit* entered into the Jewish way of being. She always referred to me as a "goy," a term which I find derogatory and offensive under any circumstances toward anyone. I learned a lot from her about the difference between observance and religiosity. I learned about tolerance and kindness. She taught me the essential values of what it really meant to be a Jew, then, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though she *davened* three times a day, no prayer could undo her hateful words and deeds. I thought about the many times I had heard the words, *Mah sheyotzei min ha-leiv nichnas laleiv*." I had never considered the concept could be applied when considering

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issues that might cause another pain. It's unfortunate that this concept can also be applied in the negative.

Another thought that I had never considered until now is that if it's used in the negative, it can always be there to remind us of its potential for blessing.

When I was little, this bubbe, Bubbe-in-the-Bronx, read me fairy tales. I learned about Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Pigs, but the story I remember the most was the Little Engine that Could. And that stayed with me all of my life as I was growing up in a dysfunctional home. And every time my father reassured me of my ineptitude, I would call on the voice of that choo-choo train saying, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

And once I broke free of that place in which I spent those difficult years, as soon as I could, at some level, I knew something special was happening when people were singing together in large groups. I wanted people to sing together in the room and I could feel the special feeling that was happening. Not just the character of the music, but what was happening with the people. When people sang the songs from their hearts, the songs became like prayers, and the world in those moments became a different place. It became a safe place. And the world made more sense to me.

Since I could not write lyrics in those days, I flashed back to *Mar Gordon* and the safe place he created for all of us, his students. Why not use *t'fillah*? Why not go back to the earliest times, the warmest times, to participate in the davening with *Mar Gordon* on *Shabbes* morning? And why not be enveloped in the *t'fillah*?

I began writing music, and people started to invite me to sing at services. And then they asked me to do concerts, and little by little, things grew. I had no idea that things were as widely spread as they were, because what was happening was not the thing to which I was paying attention. At a point, it became clear to me that I needed to pay attention. One of the wake-up calls was here, I believe. It was about 12 or 13 years ago.

I'd like to reflect on a *gemara* that I learned. It's in *B'rakhot kaf-zayin*. We're taught that there are three different proof texts that assure us that there is cause for the *Sh'moneh Esrei*, the 18 benedictions in the daily *Amidah*, and that there are different ways in which we can approach *t'fillah*. The way in which we allow ourselves to experience God and communicate our relationship with God is reflected in each one of these texts.

The first, Psalm 29, *Havu ladonai b'nei eilim*. In this Psalm, God is represented as creator, majestic, all-powerful designer of the many magnificent and praiseworthy wonders of creation. The second proof they give is the use of

the spine, the *shidra*. The spine has 18 discs, each representing a *b'rakhah*. The spine is flexible, and it moves forward and back and all around. It has the ability to move in and out of places, both personal and public. Finally, the *Sh'ma*, which focuses on love. It is the love relationship that exists between human beings and God and the promises made between us that demonstrate the power of that love. God is mentioned 18 times.

These texts provide us with three different models of *davening* and the first model of relating to God is a majestic and distant God, as creator and all-powerful. The relationship to our congregants would be more formal, remote, and more at a distance, with little opportunity for connection and intimacy. It would mostly celebrate the powerful nature of God. The second would be the *shidra*. In its flexibility, it would reach out to the *davener* in whatever way possible to draw the *davener* into the prayer experience. It bends forward, to the side, it is far-reaching, beyond the boundaries set by the text, by the environment, by any limits set in our minds about how much to let be seen and how much to keep concealed. Remember that while the *shidra* may be exposed, there's still the spinal cord, whose secrets are between you and the Holy One. The Still Small Voice rests in how we move as much as how we are able to instill a sense of growth and movement in others. The side and back and all around allows us to bring the inner-self to the *t'fillah*, and encourages closeness and interaction with the *kahal*.

Both the model of majesty and the model of intimacy would lead us to what is ultimately a driving force for each one of us. This force, the love that is "*bein adam lamakom, bein adam lachaveiro*," and "*bein adam l'atzmo*," it is with love, with flexibility and with majesty that we bring ourselves to *t'fillah*. Sometimes the *shidra*, the spine and *t'fillah*, is akin to the simple child, the *tam*, who in the *Seder* is the one "*she'eno yodei'a lish'ol*, the one who doesn't know to ask.

People come to pray not knowing what they need, in the same way that we, the prayer leaders, are unaware of the power that we have to awaken their souls and allow them the freedom to heal. This has nothing to do with ego. All of this happens within the context of the prayers themselves. These are not moments to be taken lightly, not moments of magic or miracles. They are openings, times of breakthrough where we recognize that all that we discover and discuss about the four children, the simple, the wise, the rebellious and the one who does not know how to ask, is a part of each one of us. The emergence of these pieces of ourselves does not happen suddenly on just those nights when the saltwater is there to stand in for our tears or the bitter herbs to express the distaste at hardships and the injustices we feel. When we open our hearts to freedom, freedom takes on a life of its own and we begin to reach those who are

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in *Mitzrayim*.

I think it's interesting that those who set the basic liturgy, the *matbei'ah shel t'fillah*, chose to place the *Mi Khamokha* right before the *Amidah*. In our wanderings and our ambivalence about leaving our personal *Mitzrayim* and our quest to find our *shidra* and our essence, we practice crossing the sea every day — a few times a day — in the hopes that every crossing, our soul's song will become more clear, immersed in the beauty of love that only God can create. We're asked to give that love to one another with our whole being.

My friend, Joe Septimus, writes, "This approach to God, or godliness, is not the thunderous voice or richness of the instrument, but the inarticulate, inaudible whimper, the sound of your breathing next to me, the quiet peacefulness, the white parchment, not the black words." The question of the *she'eino yode'a lish'ol* asked by wondrous, sad, inquisitive or lonely expression, heard, acknowledged by the visual embrace of the other who is there to be there. The *Amidah* is the silent prayer of the individual as community, finding oneself in the silence of others.

I found this story which spoke to me as I was preparing for today. God and the angels were talking about the creation of the planet. They said, "Now that we've got the earth, we've got the sky and the mountains and the rivers and the moon and the stars, now we will create humans. Where shall we hide the truth of their godlike qualities from them?" One of the angels said, "Hide it on the highest mountaintop." God said, "No, eventually they'll learn to scale the mountain and they will find it there." Then the angels said, "Let's take it down to the very deepest part of the ocean." God said, "Nah, don't do that. If you hide it in the deepest part of the ocean, eventually humans will learn how to go to the deepest part of the ocean and surely they'll find it there." Then another angel said, "Well, let's hide it on the moon, then." And God said, "No, eventually they'll go to the moon and they'll find it there." Finally, they all knew exactly at once where to hide this beautiful gift. It was in a place humans would never think to look. And God said, "Let this gift be hidden within every human being, for no human would think to look within themselves."

And with that, all of the great teachers, all of the sages of all times have said, there is a place within every human being, in you, that is so absolutely holy. There is a place in each of us that is absolutely pure, a place that is divine, and it is that precious piece of godliness to which we speak in our *t'fillot*, the very ones you lead and teach.

Very little of what we have been talking about in the past years has addressed the issue of you and your power and your personal gifts as hazzanim and hazzaniyot. I was all prepared to say that I felt we had wasted time together

in the past or spent too much time talking about issues that were unimportant. But, I realized that had we not had those conversations together we never would have gotten to this point where we would be able to consider anything that I had to say. I realize, in retrospect, that those conversations were important, though they were hard and, at times, each of us may have felt misunderstood or misrepresented.

By now, everyone knows that our objective is similar. Even if some parts of what we do may be dissimilar, the bottom line is: your congregants are calling to you. They're looking for you to help. We talk all about music and what you do when you sing that music. The big question is what's happening on the *bimah*? No one has the right to put you in the position of "performer." Your title defines your position in the *shul*. In the community you are the hazzanim and hazzaniyot. You are the visionaries, the ones who look to the future to build and to create. You grow your congregations, not necessarily in numbers, but in spirit and soulfulness. And to do that job, you must look into the souls of the people with whom you *daven* and to do that, you must look into yourselves to see you.

I'm willing to guess that there are those of you who are thinking, Who the heck does she think she is, telling me what to do on the *bimah*? Well, I'm nobody. I don't want to tell you what to do on the *bimah*, but I want you to know what you did for me while you were on the *bimah*. I'm someone who needed you when I was growing up. I needed direction, and I needed someone to help me understand why all the things that were happening in my life were happening. I needed someone to help me take care of myself. I needed someone to explain to me why I couldn't have a Bat Mitzvah and all of my friends could who didn't even go to Hebrew school and didn't even care about being Jewish. And even now, I need someone to help me when I'm frightened and I think about what might come down the pike for me.

So, there are times when each of us needs. There are times when I needed you and there are times when you have needed me, when each of us is vulnerable. The point is that all of us, each one of us, is vulnerable. And, that no matter how vulnerable we are, we're available to each other. And that the only way we can be available to each other is if we allow ourselves to see our frailty. And to be able to see our vulnerability is a huge strength. It requires great strength to see our brokenness and our fragility. It's a huge strength.

Sometimes you will need me by your side to remind you that you are not alone. These issues are timeless and ageless. They do not require investiture. At one time, the Little Engine That Could would suffice. But things are different now. Now you teach the paths to strength and with you there's opportunity for growth and learning.

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I've learned a lot about you in these many years and I'd like you to know some of the things I've seen, and here they are. This is how I experience you: You are delicate souls with the capacity to look beyond yourselves, to see your congregants. They make huge demands of you, but they are just your congregants.

There's a woman wearing a *tichl* who sits with her child by her side. She's attentive and she looks right at you as she holds her daughter close to her side, mouthing the words to the prayers along with you. It's clear that she's not wearing that *tichl* because she's observant. Her eyes, sunken and pale-faced, tell you she is wearing the *tichl* because she is in the process of chemotherapy. She's looking to you for a lifeline. She's waiting to hear a prayer, that prayer she will be able to keep with her until the next time she sees you. She's waiting for you to help her find a way, a prayer she will be able to use to transcend her fear. She's searching for the glue that will hold her life together. She's looking for a way to bring comfort to her child and alleviate the fear. She needs you.

There's a man in a beautiful Armani suit, his head in his hands. He's sobbing. His wife just died and when he lifts his head, he looks right at you, his tears rolling down his cheeks. He's inconsolable. He's lost in his pain and he's come to find you because your prayers have spoken to him in the past. He comes to you waiting to hear prayers like the ones you shared when he stood with his wife together with you under the *chuppah*. Now he's empty and all alone and he's naked. He's exposed. Where will he go? How will he find any place where the sounds of the tears rolling off his cheeks can be silenced? He looks to you to envelope him in the prayers you offer. He comes to you to be held in your arms over time. You are his lifeline.

A child with developmental disabilities finds the way up to the *bimah* and with his arms thrown around your legs, the child holds on for life. While you are singing in the service, the small voice of the child muttering. What the child hears is the angel in you, the messenger who establishes the pathways to prayer for all of us. We, too, need to wrap ourselves around your legs and hold you and be held by you. But our inhibitions get the best of us. This child knows when you sing, you initiate the conversation with the Holy One of Blessing. This is the beginning of that conversation for the child and the rest of us whose souls find their way up to the *bimah* with you and the child.

So much of who you are is veiled beneath that *tallit*. It's not commonplace to reveal the sensitive, gentle part of oneself. I've always said that so much of what happens in the sanctuary is affected by what goes on *outside* of the sanctuary. This is where we begin to talk about the integration of music and instruments and congregants and solos and choirs. It has little to do with music

and everything to do with how we are willing to see ourselves. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as *sh'liach* or *sh'litchat tsibbur*, as *k'lei kodesh*, as messengers, as those who carry the holy words from one place to another? You are like neurotransmitters, the connectors between the prayer and the act. This is how I see you. This holiness is only a concept until you make it come to life. It takes on life when infused with the words and prayers, with acts and deeds of *chesed* and *tsedek*, and all that can happen through song.

You are the interpreters of text. You help those who have turned a deaf ear to the possibility of hope and resurrecting positive acts of kindness and goodness in their lives. You are the crash cart for those who have been devastated by loss and have given up on life, and feel there's nothing for which to live. You are the lifeline for people who are lost, who come from homes where battering and sexual abuse, substance abuse, bulimia, mental illness, financial problems, marital problems, where the whole constellation of problems that manifest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the "me" generation. They sit in the seats of your shuls and they stare at you and your face, and they come to you because you are their lifeline.

In their minds, you translate the songs of their souls, the words of their mouths, their deepest longings into prayers with them. You have the gift that brings them closer to God because you teach them to communicate with God through song and through prayer. You offer them a language of prayer through song. You give them spiritual access and a means of reclaiming the power of their tradition and prayers. *Va'ani t'fillati* — I am the prayer. When you become the prayer, you become the means by which those who wish to pray can first begin to understand the depth of the *t'fillah*. There's no separation between you and the *t'fillah*, and not between you and the *kahal*.

I said earlier that using the negative of what comes out of the heart goes into the heart. I said it while talking about a woman filled with anger, a woman who's *farbissen*, but given the benefit of sitting with you and davening with you, she might have become a different person. Alas, she didn't have the benefit of you, nor did she become that different person and she went on to make many people unhappy.

But you think about the many people you will have the privilege of sitting in your presence. In your prayers, and being blessed by your words and your melodies, touched by your knowledge, by your Torah text, by your love of Torah, by your love of the Jewish people, by your love of tradition, by your compassion, by your tender hearts, by the texts of your lives, there's an incredible, intimate relationship that goes unstated between you and your congregants. I pray that you will know that in the most profound way. *Mah sheyotzei min haleiv nichnas laleiv* — all that you have to pour out of your hearts, for your congregants, goes into their hearts. May this be God's will. *Kein y'hi ratson*.

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## How Should We Train the Cantors of the Future?

Chair: *Hazzan Henry Rosenblum*

Presenters: *Hazzanim Scott Sokol and Nathan Lam*

### *Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

We are going through a time of enormous transition. You heard that said in the earlier session this morning regarding the ideal Conservative congregation. You saw that there is no ideal Conservative congregation — that they are all different. Likewise, the cantorates that we each can assume are different, one from the other, and the decision that we have made at JTS, is that the “cantor/slash” that Steve Stein first referred to at a convention almost ten years ago now, has become the reality. Whether you are a cantor/educator, a cantor/program director, a cantor/pastor, a cantor/music director, a cantor/cantor, each and every one of those is a valid way of fulfilling your calling, in crass terms, of making yourself marketable and ultimately, of serving the needs of the Jewish community. Because we did not feel that every student at JTS was necessarily cut out to be one particular type of hybrid, we've tried to offer different courses that will give somebody a basic skill-set in a lot of different areas, and if you choose to then study in greater depth in one of those particular areas, that may be the way in which you are most successful.

For example, every student in the Miller Cantorial School chooses between three optional courses in Jewish education. If we felt that every student was capable of being an educator in terms of heading a Hebrew school or running a Hebrew high school program, then we would have made all three education courses a requirement. We chose not to. It's the hybrid we're after: the cantor who is strong in synagogue skills in terms of reading Torah, teaching others to read Torah, Haftarah, leading *tfillot* and empowering others. If you are the expert who can *teach others*, our feeling was that would make you the most important contributor to the musical and ritual life of your congregation.

We are redoing the curriculum as we speak, a daunting task to take a curriculum which has been pretty standard for almost the 50 years of the school's history and puts it aside in order to approach the education of hazzanim as a *tabula rasa*. Because you know that there's a natural inclination to argue: “how can we not have this area of study?” Or, “how could we possibly have a well-trained cantor who doesn't know this material?” So every time we wipe the slate clean, we suddenly discover all sorts of stuff imprinted on it. Having said that as a preamble, I now invite my fellow Deans of cantorial schools to present their own answers to the question before us.

*Hazzan Scott Sokol:*

First of all, I want to thank the organizers of this forum for scheduling time to allow us to think about what I think is a really critical conversation, namely, the education of future hazzanim. I'm grateful to be able to offer a few words up front, as each of us will, but I'm frankly more interested in hearing what you all have to say about this topic, because I think it's a really important one.

By way of introduction, I think most of you know that I began my career not as a cantor in professional life, but as a research psychologist and a professor. Education has, therefore, always been central to my own professional mission and, at this point, I've had a couple of decades' experience teaching graduate level and professional schools. And so, when Hebrew College tasked me to create a graduate cantorial program, I drew on that experience, as well as on what I think was an excellent education that I received at JTS, to craft a program that would reflect the realities of the present-day while maintaining close contact with our cantorial educational heritage. Being able to affect, as Henry Reese put it, a *yeish me'ayin* kind of program, was a rare opportunity and one that required a lot of initial thinking as well as continued refinement today.

I want to tell you a bit about what motivated and continues to motivate the cantor-educator program at Hebrew College. Initially, in looking out on the cantorial and the general Jewish landscape, I saw several things that pointed me in a couple of important directions.

First, I realized, as we all did, that the golden age of the pulpit artist was likely behind us. I believe that being a fairly newly minted cantor myself and having never experienced that golden age as a practitioner, freed me somewhat from any undue nostalgia, and by that I mean no disrespect, just a sense of going back to what no longer was. Rather, I took this reality as an opportunity. If participation was to be the new name of the game, well, then, I figured our students should be able to participate in a very high level and be able to educate others to participate. And so I knew that education was going to be an important part of what we did at Hebrew College. Of course, I knew that most cantors were already Jewish educators, but I also knew that most played that role more from gut instinct and effective improvisation than from actual planning, training and teaching. I remembered the words often quoted to me by *Moreinu ha-Hazzan*, Max Wohlberg, *zikhrono livrakha*, that the best improvisation is a planned improvisation. So I decided that our graduates would indulge in a lot of planning by actually training as educators.

Now, as Henry mentioned, we don't have all of the students doing this, but most of our students are in what we call the cantor-educator track. The impetus of this idea of *hazzan m'chaneikh* was basically that our graduates would

receive their ordination, but their Master's degree would not be in Sacred Music, would not even be in Jewish studies, but rather would be focused in Jewish education. Moreover, they would take, in addition to general education courses, specific targeted courses at the intersection of Jewish music and Jewish education: things like: "Teaching and Facilitating *T'fillah*," "B'nei Mitzvah Pedagogy" and "Topics in Jewish Music Education." Along with these we offer courses like "*Keva* vs. *Kavannah*: The Dialectic of Prayer Leading." We really try to focus our attention on some of those specific areas.

The second trend that I saw was transdenominationalism. Hebrew College, for those of you who don't know, has been a transdenominational institution, from the beginning, and so has its program. I want to talk a little about transdenominationalism because I think it's very important, especially for my Conservative colleagues. The motivation behind such a school is based on at least three intersecting goals, as far as I'm concerned.

The first is simply to serve transdenominational or nondenominational congregations. There are an ever-growing number of these congregations and communities. The reasons that such communities choose not to affiliate with a major movement are obviously outside the scope of this talk. But whatever the reasons are, it seems to me that they want to be served by graduates — rabbis and cantors — who have a broad and unconstrained viewpoint on ritual practice, largely.

Another reason for the transdenominational approach is, frankly, pedagogical. Our student's traditional nusach and cantorial recitative as well as cantillation is taught at our school by some of the best people: Brian Mayer, Charles Osborne and Josh Jacobson. But they also study contemporary repertoire from luminaries like Jeff Klepper, who has written a lot of the repertoire. So they do get both sides.

But more than the subject matter of transdenominational education, the pedagogy I refer to has to do with our students, who are, themselves, from different denominational backgrounds. In the same classroom, we have Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and a great number of the New Age or Renewal denominations — largely because our rector at Hebrew College, Arthur Green, attracts a lot of those folks to the school. They study in the same classes, they talk with each other about their backgrounds, they force each other to unpack assumptions about their ritual practice and their religious beliefs. In so doing, I really believe that they come away with a richer perspective on their emerging worlds as cantors and rabbis.

The third reason for offering a transdenominational program is a spiritual one. Many of our students come not know what they are. They don't

feel like they can conform to the mold of a denomination, and part of why they're in school is to figure out where they are and where they want to ultimately be. Many will choose to affiliate themselves either with Reform or Conservative congregations, but others will choose not to limit their personal identity or the domains where they serve. They may serve a Reform congregation and a Conservative congregation at the same time.

The final trend that really influences my thinking about this is that many of us find ourselves in sole-practitioner situations, especially in smaller congregations. And so, in addition to the cantor-educator program, from the very beginning, I also wanted to start a dual ordination track of rabbis and cantors. In a kind of *sof ma'aseh b'machashava t'chilah* way, I'm hopeful that this year we finally will actually be doing that. We've already started the process, so that we can dually train rabbis and cantors together and do so in a reasonable frame of time, so that you don't have to be like my good buddy, Neil Blumofe, flying off to the Academy while he's trying to maintain a very large pulpit in Austin, Texas, or similarly, someone like our colleague Lily Kaufman, who had the patience of a mountain climber to go through both programs, one after the other. That is what you need to do currently, though I imagine the situation will be changing in a lot of the schools.

We're trying to offer some sort of dual ordination track in a reasonable frame of time — seven years — and hope that we will have students who will do that, as well as those who will not necessarily dually ordain, but will really study seriously, so we'll have rabbis who will study *nusach* seriously and hazzanim who will study text in a serious way. We've even talked about a slightly different length of time for those students.

The last thing I want to say is that I feel it's really important to state something about my particular school, Hebrew College. That is, that we really are not, and we never have been, trying to compete with either JTS or HUC or the AJR, at this point. Our goals are different, our motivations are different and our constituencies are largely different. That said, certainly some of our students will unfortunately end up competing, unfortunately, at some level. I think that's the reality.

My own sense of the future of this profession, or maybe I should say my hope, is that cantorial and rabbinical education in this country will adopt a model more akin to other professions, namely an unyoking of the professional school with the movement-centered professional organization. When you study to be a lawyer, of course you go to the law school that best meets your needs — whether it's geographical or philosophical — and then you take the Bar exam where you want to study and practice in law. Similarly in medical education,

there was a time when the hospital you studied in was the hospital you worked in. That is no longer the case. I think there's no reason why our professions can't do that as well. Of course, there will always be a closer and important relationship between the Miller School and the Cantors Assembly and between HUC and the ACC. That's natural and that should be expected. But I frankly think that if others who really are serious and have studied want to enter these professions, we should let them do so in terms of the professional organizations, making sure they know what we expect them to know for our particular organization. The knowledge, the skills, the experiences need to be there, but frankly, the politics don't need to be there. I know there are some who will disagree with me and as long as those disagreements are *l'sheim shamayim*, I'm okay with that, and I will end at that point. Thanks.

*Hazzan Nathan Lam:*

Scott, I wholeheartedly agree with your last statement. The Academy for Jewish Religion in California was started about seven years ago. Originally, there was a relationship between the West Coast and the East Coast. We soon saw that we were on very different pages on how we wanted to proceed as a school, so we disaffiliated ourselves. It is a school that first started with a very heavy hand on Renewal. Its first founders were identified with Renewal for a very short period of time.

They hired Rabbi Jack Schechter, then Dean of the Continuing Education Department at the University of Judaism. He was a *yeshiva* graduate, originally from Pittsburgh, who then became Dean of the Rabbinical school. He called me and said, "Would you be the Dean of the Cantorial school?" Even though I'm cantor of a Reform congregation, the same one for 32 years, my leanings are not that way. My leanings are more toward tradition. When Jack called me, I said, "fine."

We put together a committee and we took the two curricula from JTS and HUC, looked them over and found what Henry did — every time you clean the slate you find that *Yshayahu* was right. He said we are *asirei tikvah*, prisoners of hope. And that's a very, very good thing. Being cantors we are *asirei nusach*, which I don't view as being a bad thing. I look at it as a good thing. So we put together a curriculum which combined many of the similar ideas of both schools.

Ours is a five-year program: 210 units, a thesis and a recital required at the end. In November, we are going WACS, which is the Western Association of Colleges and Schools, for accreditation. That has actually helped me to focus on an idea of how to change the curriculum. Why? Because you're looking at every class in terms of what is the exit strategy? You're looking at learning outcomes,

the same stuff that I'm sure that you do on the East Coast. This learning-outcome thing becomes a very interesting focal point because you're saying, "what are you producing at the end of five years?"

Now, I'm a practical person, a pragmatist. I say, "how do I want the job to end?" Then I go back to work. First we put together a curriculum, not knowing exactly how it was going to work itself out, and then we put together a faculty. When you are using an adjunct faculty and not a tenured faculty, you have the ability to hire just about anybody you want. Normally you're not hiring all academics, you're hiring people in the field and usually you can get the top people in the field. Especially in Los Angeles, which is the second largest Jewish community in the United States, you can get a very high caliber person in congregations or who teaches at other institutions to come and to teach in your departments.

We are very proud. We are also post-denominational, which I think has many pros to it. I totally agree with you that the Assembly and the ACC need to look at these new models instead of making it difficult for our graduates. So I'm going to put that as a sidebar to say: I'm looking at a different model for the profession because the big elephant in this room, in the entire convention, in both organizations, is the lack of jobs in the job market.

However, I'm looking at this as *no lack* of jobs available. I'm looking at the fact that we are not providing people who can be cantors for three-to-five-hundred family congregations. That's who we have to go after, because more than half of the congregations in this country don't have cantors. We have to find a way of providing cantors who serve their needs. Instead of having them get an assistant rabbi, we should be ordaining cantors who have been provided with enough text study and ability to teach many different subjects. It's education, but education with a different spin.

We started with this program, 210 units. We started off with three students, then five students, and now we have 22 students who are up for ordination in cantorial school, about 80 all together. Some of our students are right out of college, others after their Master's degree in some related subject. We have other people who are physicians, all types of second-career people, looking at the cantorate in a much different way. We have on faculty Don Gurney who taught at Hebrew Union College, Joe Gole, Jeremy Lipton who is now leaving and going to San Antonio, Sam Radwine and Jay Fraylich. We go across the denominational spectrum. We are post-denominational, or if you prefer, a nondenominational school. We boast about this, we think this is a great thing. We have people from Orthodox to Reconstructionist to Renewal teaching at this school, so the students get the full gamut of theological, practical and

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religious practices and models for services.

Having said that, we come to the question of how do you make it relevant? We, too, are trying to figure out a model. We look at the curriculum and say, “what are we doing here?” I’m a message person, hammering people to stay on target. The message that I hammer away at is relevancy. The cantorate must be relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and must adjust itself. One of the things our beloved Sam Rosenbaum said in one of his speeches was that the cantorate was changing — in his day — every 20 years.

The cantorate is changing. Just look at that lecture by Debbie Friedman. How would we have accepted a lecture from someone who we considered to be *bachutz* — an outsider — ten years ago? The cantorate has morphed itself. We are now looking at a cantorate that has changed every two or three years out of necessity and through self-awareness.

Yes, we have to be *ba’alei nusach*. That means some of the classes will be really specific. I love *nusach*. I grew up on *nusach*. I love *davening*. Maybe after my cantorate I’ll go back to an Orthodox synagogue and just go on and on. I just want to go in and *daven* and maybe that’s for me when I’m done. But that’s not what my congregants are looking for. That’s maybe not what we want to teach them.

Looking at *nusach*, I have to say, okay, some of the *piyyutim* on Rosh Hashanah may be not as important. Maybe we have to start looking at different types of models even for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. *Yamim Nora’im*, which were sacrosanct musically, are now being invaded by the repertoire of Friday Night Live, by the Unplugged Friday night. Even *Shabbat* morning is morphing itself into that. High Holy Days was not. It is now happening.

Looking at our *nusach* curriculum, I think we have to take a different tack on all of this and say, “what is it that we want these people to go out with?” I think we want them to be an educator, a facilitator, an expert and a producer — a producer of events. The event is called “Shabbat.” Okay? We are currently like the Cineplex. I hate the word Cineplex. It turns us into a mall-theater with ten different films. I don’t like that. I think that we are producers of *sacred* events. My friend Joe Gole has coined that phrase and helped me lock into that. I think we have to lock into that. That’s one of the things we are.

Another thing is that if you don’t train students to be able to relate to the people they’re serving, they will not have jobs. I don’t care how much *nusach* they know. I don’t care how musical they are. I don’t care how great their voice is. I don’t care how bad their voice is. Oh, they’re a *mentsch*. They’re *heimish*. Another word, a push-button word for me is *heimish* — an excuse for mediocrity in many ways. You all know that. Oh, they’re so *heimish* there. You put your feet

on the furniture; that doesn't work for me. Relevancy means that if we train you to be a pulpit cantor, here's what you need to know. You have to know how to give a speech. You have to know how to look at texts. Text has to turn you on. *Midrash* has to turn you on and you have to be able to turn people on with that.

I tell my students that in addition to learning all of the things that we require of them, they have to know one subject that they have to study on their own. I don't care what the subject is. They have to know how to study something on their own to become an expert at it whether it's Jewish film, to teach a class to adults on Jewish film, whether it be Jewish music, whether it be a certain part of Jewish history, whether it be Jewish music, Israeli music — something they can teach on their own that sets them apart from all the rest of the people on their staff.

The last thing is that we have to be the source people on the staff so when they're considering cutting the liturgy and they say, "well, what was this put in here for?" "Why *Ochila La'eil*" or "why that *nusach*?" "Why is it this or why is it ...?" You have to know the reason why, and if you don't know, at least you should know where to find out why and how to answer. If your *shacharit* on *Yamim Nora'im* is a full *shacharit* and you don't remember all of the *piyyutim*, thank God there's Pinchas Spiro. He has it, you can teach it. You can do that. I think that there are many things on that plate of curriculum that are so important but that we can't get to in 210 units, in five years. We just can't do it. For me then, the goal is to say, "what is it that's going to make that person successful, marketable and keep the job?"

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

I said to one of my colleagues as Debbie Friedman was beginning: "the successful cantor is the eclectic person, the one who takes the best of every model that is out there and finds a way of incorporating it." You cannot close yourself off to any of the different styles and modes that are out there, you must allow yourself to have another point of access to members of your congregation. The more tools you have, the greater the likelihood is that you will be, as Nate says, relevant.

*Question:*

Are you limiting the number of students? I'm afraid there is going to be a time when there are a limited number of *shuls*. Is that being addressed at all?

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

On the one hand you have *torah lishma*. There are people who want to learn what

our schools have to offer and I think it's incumbent upon us to train people. But we also have to be willing to walk the difficult tightrope of: "when I accept students in the school, am I guaranteeing them employability when they finish going to school?" I'm sure we all have faced that. If somebody comes in with what I feel is a skill-set that could make them employable, I'm prepared to train them. But we can't guarantee they're going to get a job. Our hope is that the people who are educated well, who have a varied skill-set, can find employment somewhere. There are places for cantors to be employed where we have just not scratched the surface yet. There is no reason why *rashei t'fillah* in Jewish day schools, by definition, must be rabbis. It makes no sense. It makes no sense that synagogues seek to hire an assistant rabbi instead of a cantor. We have to make sure that our product can fill that additional spot within the synagogue hierarchy.

That being said, we have about 40 students at the Miller School. I don't want more than 40 because I think we can probably place those eight graduates each year. So far, the track record has been very high. But for the first time there are two people who didn't get jobs this year and that's a concern.

*Hazzan Nathan Lam:*

There have been times when there was a tremendous void. We had not enough cantors to satisfy the job market. We trained cantors and they couldn't get jobs, some, not many. But we trained them, they went through the school and they couldn't get the jobs. Hence, you look at the Cantors Assembly and see how people became members and the tests we gave them over the years, it was a Catch 22. People had to be a cantor for five or seven years before they could take the test, but they got into the Cantors Assembly without that education. They had to have a job and they had to take the test seven years after they already had the job. It was an interesting model. I totally agree with you. I think that the problem here is not necessarily how many people we have been training, it's how we approach the market, a changing market. Look at the United States in relation to the world. We, too, have to change our approach to the world market in terms of what our economy is doing. It is no less important for us to periodically re-envision how we see the Cantorate. I see the Cantorate where there will be more cantors going back to rabbinic school getting dual ordination. It makes totally no sense for a congregation of 300-to-500 families to hire an assistant rabbi, but if he or she has a guitar and they're playing and they do song leading, it looks like and smells like it kind of has a feeling of what's going on. Jews in our day and age see what other places do. If it looks successful, they want to copy that. It is what it is. We have to take the best people possible and train

them. The best people, if they're trained well, will always get jobs.

*Hazzan Scott Sokol:*

I agree with everything both Henry and Nate have said. The issue of *lishma* is one thing, but the other thing is that we are actually creating new jobs. I want to point that out. I have been approached by many congregations over the last few years before we started this cantor-educator program who said, "you know, we did have a position, we needed an educator, so what is a cantor-educator?" Then they have gone on to hire cantor-educators, who would not have hired cantors. So we are creating jobs.

The other point is an amalgam. Our students understand when they come in, they're likely not going to necessarily have that one pulpit. They're going to be working in three different places and they're OK with that. I'm OK with that. I think we need to be viewing what we can do as trainers of cantors much more holistically. There's a lot more we can do. And as Nate said, half the congregations in the country don't have cantors. We need to create the positions, create the marketplace that requires it.

A last word about the Assembly. I was talking to Joe Gole about it last night. Just as I think we have to say to our students coming in, "we may not give you jobs but we're still accepting you as a student because we value that you want to study and we want to teach you." Just as we do that, I frankly think the cantorial organizations also need to do this. They do not have to produce jobs. Becoming a member of the Cantors Assembly is no guarantee that the organization is going to find you a position. I think we have to stop thinking about the CA and the ACC as placement organizations first and foremost. I think we are members of these organizations because we value that unique comradeship, we value the collegiality, we value what it is that we do as a profession. There are a lot of different ways around this but it's not all about placement. Even in terms of a cantorial school accepting students, it's not always about placement.

*Question:*

If congregations want to hire an assistant rabbi, is something being done to try to encourage them that the cantor would be a different, better path to follow?

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

The answer is: absolutely. I think all of you know our Placement Chair, Bob Scherr. He does a really terrific job. We're out there talking to congregations all the time about exactly what's been discussed here this morning, especially in

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terms of the development of new positions. Henry also spoke about the different models which I will be addressing on Wednesday morning. The short answer is that we are out there talking to congregations all the time. I know Henry does some of that, as well. When we know a congregation is trying to decide whether they want an assistant rabbi or a hazzan, of course we point out to them that if they hire an invested hazzan, that person likely can do all the things an assistant rabbi can do. So we are absolutely out there dealing with these issues.

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

There is no question — we really need to empower certain people for whom this is going to be their portfolio — to make contact with the congregations and through the RA and in the Rabbinical School. As Nate whispered to me, we must remember, however, that the rabbis have their own agenda. They're concerned about not enough jobs for their own. Thankfully, half of the rabbinical graduates are not going into pulpit work. That's turning out to be good for us, however, it remains a concern.

A congregation that was looking called me up and said, "You know, we really want an assistant rabbi." I said, "Tell me why you want an assistant rabbi." They gave me the reasons and I said, "So why in the world are you wasting your time trying to get an assistant rabbi, when, if you hire a hazzan, you're going to get everything you want plus a vibrant musical life for your congregation." They ultimately hired the hazzan and are thrilled with her. This is a prototype of what we must do in more places.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

We had a situation in Akron, in my neighboring Reform congregation, where the hazzan was let go and they decided: "We don't need a cantor, we'll hire an assistant rabbi." After about four years, they realized it was a terrible, terrible mistake. They said, "We'll hire an assistant rabbi and we'll get a soloist." It was a disaster for them and they have now hired a recent graduate from the cantorial school at Hebrew Union College.

*Question:*

I am a fifth year student. My thesis, which is due a year from now, is re-envisioning the cantorate for the American Jewish community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, for which I have found that there is really no reference material, so I have to create my own empirical data. In any event, I'm simultaneously encouraged and discouraged by the discussion I am hearing in this room because at first, I wanted to say that it seems to me that the cantorate has to be more

proactive instead of reactive. The tail cannot wag the dog, so to speak. I'm hearing anecdotal evidence that it's not entirely the case, but what is the tipping point? To quote Malcolm Gladwell's book, what will be the tipping point to institutionalize those things that the cantorate can do proactively to bring the American Jewish community along with them instead of reacting to their needs or what they think their needs are?

*Hazzan Nathan Lam:*

You mention the tipping point. That was about Hush Puppies. They took something that was completely out and made it in. Were they proactive or reactive? We've been trying to be proactive. The fact is that the nature of the playing field has changed radically. We're trying to be proactive. Is it to get cantors jobs? Is that the goal? Or is it to make sure the American synagogue has a meaningful approach to prayer, that has music as part of it, that somehow there is some DNA thread of *nusach*, something of our tradition that's in it, that inspires people so that we can all be talking the same language rather than, "he likes Jeff Klepper and I like Debbie Friedman and you like *Chayim ben Shmerl Berl!*" Being proactive means that as an organization we have to say, "What are we doing here?" These types of conversations put us all on the same page. All of us are practical. I'm a member of both the ACC and the Cantors Assembly. So we talk these things through, we start looking at them. Fear, to quote Roosevelt, is our worst enemy. If we fear the future, we will be paralyzed by it. Therefore, you can be down 3-1 and still win the finals if you just believe. So to respond to your question, is that the tipping point here changes constantly and what's in last week is out this week. We have to make people ready for this challenge. In the back of our minds we have a hidden agenda. We all come to prayer wanting it to be relevant, we want prayer to be relevant, we want believing Jews, we want people who can go to a synagogue service and find meaning in it, not just for healing but because they enjoy *shabbes*. My Orthodox friends can't wait for *shabbes*, not because they want to be healed, they just like *shabbes*. It feels good. Being a Jew is a good thing.

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

This is what I took from Debbie Friedman's session this morning. She told you all in words that you all intuit, that there is a need on the part of people for something spiritual in their lives, not only in shul. Music is the tool that will help them access the spiritual and the divine. We have to help the people in leadership positions in congregational life understand that we are not just musical adornments but that we are the vehicles that can help people access that

spiritual element in their lives.

*Hazzan Nathan Lam:*

We keep thinking music, we keep thinking *t'fillah*, we keep thinking that way instead of saying the essence here is about belief. Unless they feel there is *chovah*, the less Jews feel obligated to come to *shul*; it's going to be a show every week. It's got to be something new, it's got to be a guitar, a band, a this, a that. We must approach it from the standpoint that we are trying to make them into Jews who feel that they're responsible to come to shul for community, to be there to daven together, that prayer is meaningful not just because it makes me feel good, that I have some obligation to pray, that prayer is part of what it means to be a Jew. What a thought that is: God might *listen* to my prayers! We teach people that God listens to prayer, not that I become the prayer myself. That's great too, that's another approach. But somehow, without *emunah*, these things fall on deaf ears. Remember, people vote on what they believe with their feet. They're not coming to *shul* except for special programs. They'll come once a month for Friday Night Live, Friday Night Unplugged. That's great — I'm the biggest proponent of it. At the same time, I'm going to be honest about it, unless we teach them that there has to be *gloyben*, belief, otherwise all of this will go away and we'll see diminishing numbers in the American synagogue.

*Hazzan Scott Sokol:*

To take that last point one step further, I agree that belief is also important, but the other thing we can uniquely bring is emotion, and not just emotion through music, but about text. We need to love text, we need to be able to give *divrei torah*. I think I probably give a better *d'var torah* than I do a recitative. It's important that we love our text, but the reason is not just for the text itself, it's to make people emote. Hazzanim are able to do that, on every level. When people come to the synagogue, even if they don't have belief, if they're moved emotionally about their lives in some way, that's what's going to get them there. We need, in all the things we do, to be always focused on that which we can bring, uniquely, as spiritual leaders. We can bring emotional life to emotionally dead people.

*Question:*

Getting back for a moment to the question that was asked earlier, about trying to persuade a congregation to choose a cantor rather than an associate rabbi. I've been out of school for 30 years so I don't know, are the salaries that would be asked by newly graduating hazzanim comparable to that being asked by the

rabbis or is there a financial differential?

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum*

They're not making this choice on dollars. The choice of hazzan vs. assistant rabbi, that's not a choice based upon dollars. Rabbis are far more effective at telling their congregants that what they need is an assistant rabbi.

*Question:*

One of the panelists this morning talked about the importance of relationships between rabbis and cantors starting in school and how that's changing at JTS, at least. I believe we need rabbis as advocates. We need the rabbi to say, "Don't hire an assistant rabbi, hire a cantor." I'm wondering what the state is right now at your schools of our future cantors with their future rabbinic counterparts? What's the relationship like right now?

*Hazzan Nathan Lam:*

At our school it's very good. They study together, but that doesn't necessarily make for a good relationship. We've seen that over the years. I think because the faculties blend together they respect what the cantor does and we respect what they do. In the big world is there the perception that we look like grasshoppers and they look like giants? Perception becomes reality in the real world of the cantorate and the rabbinate. If the trend is: we're going to hire an assistant rabbi because the rabbi wants somebody to take over for him and doesn't want the cantor to open up his mouth or give a *d'var torah*, that could be it. To put it crassly, the question once again is, how do you sell this? How do you put a picture on it? How do you market this? How do you define what the new cantor is going to look like? One of our students is doing her thesis on this very subject.

Arthur Green is a great man, a great visionary, a brilliant speaker and is very heavily associated with Kabbalah and mysticism. That's one of the buzz words that sells. I don't know exactly what that means, but I think this has to do with how the professional organizations see themselves. I don't want to divorce the professional organizations from the job market and the cantorate. I gently disagree with you about what the Cantors Assembly's responsibility is in the job market. This is all about strategy, looking at this, making ourselves a 2- to 5-year or a 10-year program as a professional organization. The schools have to do that and say here's where we're going with it. Then we should hire public relations people, hire advertising people, hire people who know how to create an image that helps us make ourselves look like we're supposed to in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, that is, the spiritual leaders we know we are. That's how I see it.

***Hazzan Scott Sokol:***

I agree with the last questioner completely. Rabbis are really our most important advocates, both on the congregational level and also in the school. When we've made progress in my school, it's when the rabbinical students and faculty have seen that the cantorial students and faculty have a lot to offer them. When we do programs together, they see our perspective. We just recently did a High Holiday mini-mester for a week with our two schools. The responses I got were "Wow! I didn't know that," about something we were bringing to the table about the High Holy Day practice. Having the senior rabbi as an advocate saying, "I want a cantor, I don't want an assistant rabbi," is really important. Look, rabbis have been very quick, as they should be, to have music as part of their portfolios, especially if they're musically talented. We really need to be able to use text and other things, as I said, as part of *our* portfolio. We need to go where they are, they're coming to where we are, we need to not see these things as territorial, we need to be really collaborative in terms of how we approach it. We may approach music differently than they do, we may approach text differently than they do. I give a different type of *d'var torah* than my rabbi does. They're both valid but they're different. We need to speak each other's languages but always bring our own nuance to it. That's when our rabbinic colleagues will see that we offer something different and complementary and not just someone who will do what they don't want to do, so let's hire an assistant rabbi.

***Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:***

One piece of the way in which cantorial students have risen in the eyes of their rabbinic colleagues has to do with the presence of cantorial students at *minyan* at JTS. The cantorial student who was a stranger to daily *minyan*, no matter what that person could do or bring to the table, was not viewed as someone who took *Yiddishkeit* seriously. As the students over the past few years assumed much more of a presence at daily *minyan*, they have become true *chevruta* partners with their rabbinical school colleagues. It has now begun to be expressed in the graduating *siyyum* in that it doesn't have to be limited to a joint study of Talmudic text. The rabbinical students who had been doing it for five years at least and the cantorial students who are really still beginners in text study are not on an equal footing. In their *chevruta* study, the rabbinical student taught the cantorial student and then they'd present it together at the *siyyum*. That relationship, besides being flawed, was doomed from the beginning. There's actually been a whole move starting this year and moving into next for the nature of the *siyyum* to be a different one. Each one will be able to present their area of expertise as valid study. It's just the beginning, but it's a *major* change.

*Question:*

In an environment where a hazzan may be very careful about what he does not to make his rabbi jealous, are you taking into consideration the fact that you're training the hazzan to do those things that the rabbis do, such as giving a *d'var torah* or sermon? Would that actually be a deterrent for him to get a position when the senior rabbi thinks, "Well, here I'm going to have even greater competition because he can do the hazzan's job and he can also do my job, maybe even better than I?" Have you considered that?

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

It's a significant question which was mentioned earlier when we were talking about territorial concerns and how we have to get past that. If you have a positive relationship with the rabbi with whom you work, you will each realize that the work you're doing is for the betterment of the life of the congregation. If you have an opportunity to speak and the rabbi realizes that you can bring something important to the table, that's something you'll be able to do. If that person feels threatened by you there's nothing you can do to help that person not feel threatened.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

I have two responses. One was something that Robert Kieval whispered in my ear, that I've said many times. That is, an assistant rabbi is far more threatening to the senior rabbi than the hazzan. So keep that in mind when the shul is thinking about an assistant rabbi — the hazzan is not a threat. I also found, in my congregation, that my rabbi is delighted by the fact that I deliver eulogies, because when there is a death and he's on vacation (he's entitled to his vacation) then he doesn't have to feel guilty for being gone. When there's a death in your congregation, the family does not want some stranger giving the eulogy for their beloved mother or their beloved spouse. They want somebody who knows the family. I know, and I'm not the only one, that the rabbis I've worked with have been thrilled that I can give a eulogy so they don't have to look over their shoulder when they're out of town.

*Hazzan Henry Rosenblum:*

Putting death on the table and realizing that there is an upside to it, makes the future of the cantorate seem bright, it is not, indeed!

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## Chaplaincy Track: Spiritual Assessment, Illness & Health

Rev. Harlan Ratmeyer

I think our relationships in pastoral conduct relating to the varieties of spiritual needs are challenges for which encouragement and resources from individuals such as yourselves would be most welcome. Perhaps we can speak to coping with our own needs. Many of us find ourselves ministering to people we have known for many years and with whom we may feel quite a loss. How does one minister to others when your own needs are present?

As I understand my task today, it is to talk with you about concepts of pastoral care, spirituality or ministry that are universal, because we all come with a faith tradition of one kind or another. In the Jewish community, there are specific rituals and rites that when you say death and when you say funeral, you think of them immediately. In the Islamic community, in the Christian community and in other faith groups, the same thing happens. We say funeral and think of certain things that are supposed to happen. We all bring those specific rituals to what we do. But then there are things underneath that all of these rituals and rites of our various faith communities are addressing. They are common underpinning elements of the experience of death that every human being faces. We may approach it somewhat differently, but there are commonalities, so I will focus today on some of the commonalities.

Far be it from me to teach you how to do your liturgy and your rites. That would be the height of arrogance. To me, this subject grows out of an understanding of the root of what we do when we're in ministry, in a sense, the word "crisis" helps me to understand it. Crisis, (from the Greek *krinein* to separate), means something is happening that separates us from something else. A crisis is a separation of my life from my youth as I grow older. That's a gradual crisis, until one day you look in the mirror and you say, "who is that?" And you realize you're being separated, slowly, from your age. It is a growing crisis.

There are other crises that happen even in good times. You get a promotion and then you worry whether you can be successful in that. Again, you're being separated from what was familiar and good. Even though you're going to something better, there's a crisis in it. So when we come to death and loss and grief, we are really talking about major crises, sometimes sudden separations.

I think of Rabbi Harold Kushner who wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. In one of the first examples in his book, he talks about the young woman who suffered an aneurysm while she was in college. Early one morning, walking to class, she just collapsed on the sidewalk and was gone. They called

him and he came to the house. The mother was trying to cope with this terrible, terrible separation. The first words she said to him were, "I know we should have gone to the Yom Kippur service." They had missed it that year, and since this was only about a month later, the first thing she thought of, trying to make sense of the crisis was, "we missed, and the Big Guy zapped us with a lightening bolt." We all try to make sense out of crisis.

Crisis is a separation – sometimes gradual, sometimes you know it's going to happen. I have a friend who is dying of lung cancer. He was a committed, devoted smoker all of his life. Every time I was with him he would say, "Let's step outside and have a smoke." He smoked little black cigarettes. Once in a while I'd go out and puff on one with him a little bit. I'm a polite person, but I'm not a smoker. I probably would love to be, but it just isn't smart. He was diagnosed about a year ago with lung cancer. He called me and said, "I would like you to do my funeral." He was planning things out. He knew the treatment would be worse than the illness. He's doing nothing about it, except that he is smoking his cigarettes. Given the circumstances I said, "God be with you." So the crisis is coming and he and his wife are preparing. They're having the children over. They're doing a lot of things. He calls me every Saturday. We talk about the weather and once in a while I'll say, "And, symptoms, how are the symptoms?" He'll say, "They're improving, as the doctor said they would. They are getting stronger and stronger. They're growing." He still has good spirits even though he coughs quite a bit while he talks to me on the phone. It's a crisis but it's a different crisis than the teenager the other night who lost control of his car, plunged into a center divider on the freeway and was brought to the hospital D.O.A. The family had to be told of that.

Crisis is one way to think about what happens. It's a separating moment, a dividing moment in life when something separates. There can be many different kinds of crises. Often they will call the cantor, the rabbi, the pastor, the priest, the imam, and they will ask you to do something. So you'll go to the house with a mouth full of teeth, and you're supposed to do something while you're there. That's what we'll talk about this afternoon.

Dr. Mark Stein was a resident of mine last year in Clinical Pastoral Education. We loved him. When he was done with that program, the Board of Rabbis needed a new chaplain for the hospital and we recommended him. Then we also hired him for some more part-time work, so Mark is with us a lot. He's written two unpublished papers, but I think they may be published sooner or later. One is particularly important. It's on the Jews and the ritual of baptism. It can be useful information in the hospital when you're on-call. Albany Med is a magnet for all of the sick babies in about 150 to 200 miles in each direction.

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One night we had five infant deaths. I think the record was six a few years back, but this last year, one night we had five infant deaths. The sickest of the preemies and the problem pregnancies are taken by helicopter or ambulance to Albany Med, one of the area's major trauma centers. It's in those moments that Christians often call for a child to be baptized. That's a whole story in itself, but Mark has done some very creative work around that reflection.

He presented something else to the students. He talked about the seven remarkable things that Jews do surrounding death. He said, don't try to comfort the mourners. It's pretty much an insult to try to give words to something that can't be fixed. Second, don't say anything when you walk into a house of mourning. I learned that, but we Christians walk in right away and say, "she's in a better place now," and all those kinds of silly things. But he said, "don't say anything when you walk in." Don't study the Torah in the presence of the deceased or the mourners in a shiva house or cemetery. Tear your clothes. Die a little every day. Thank God for returning your soul in the morning. The public, joyous world still has a claim on you, the private mourner, and there is an interface of being joyful for someone's wedding or someone's birth in the midst of your mourning. Recite Kaddish.

We respond very differently culturally to death. I would imagine, as there is a great variety within other traditions, it is certainly no different for your community of faith across the country and maybe where your ancestors came from. All I know is that I was born and raised in northern Illinois in a Germanic community of Calvinists. We're pretty stern people and believe in the sovereignty of God. We are all about work. We get blamed for the Protestant work ethic as all that belongs to the Calvinists. I guess we're all to blame for that.

My cousin died when he was about 17 and I was 14. That morning he had yelled at his mother, "Dammit, stop hounding me about my driving!" He popped the clutch on his Plymouth and threw gravel up against the barn as he took off out of the yard. That night, on the way home from work, he drove his car around a curve very, very rapidly. He missed the curve and a willow twig was driven through his head. For two days he lay with that willow twig through his head and then he died. My Aunt Bertha, my dad's sister, was grief stricken, as was the whole family. I remember at the funeral, every so often, you could hear her weeping a bit. Just a bit, but you could hear this weeping going on occasionally. After we went to the cemetery, we came back to the church for coffee and sandwiches and, in the Midwest, Jell-O salad. We were sitting there and one of my uncles said to another, "I can't believe it, I am shocked. I thought Bertha had more faith than that." What they were saying was in that community

you hold back your grief because he's in a better place. He's where we all want to be. So that if you had faith, you wouldn't weep. You'd be happy for Roger. That was kind of the mentality they were pushing over on us. As a 14-year-old boy, I remember I thought a lot less of my uncles that day than I did before. It angered me a great deal to think about this.

My first congregation after seminary was in Muskegon Heights, Michigan. A little dying Dutch group of Calvinists had moved to the suburbs but their congregational building was still in the city, surrounded by African-Americans. It was the time of Dr. King. I had gone to Chicago and marched with Dr. King in the March on Cicero and attended a three-month course at the Urban Training Center. I came back a fairly excited, social action, sixties-type guy and was very active in the community. This little congregation really came along. For some reason, we ended up just loving each other, and the community and the congregation were pretty much transformed. In about five years they had both integrated and radically turned their ministry around. Young whites from the suburbs and hippies (some of you are too young to remember what that is), but hippies even came to church on Sunday mornings.

Once in a while, I would get called next door to visit Mrs. Turner who lived next door to the church. Old Mrs. Turner was in her eighties and lived with her son, his wife and their children. Mrs. Turner made a really good chocolate chip cookie. Sometimes in the morning she'd call the parsonage, the church office, and say, "Pastor, I think it's time for a break. I've got the coffee on and the cookies coming out of the oven." I'd say, "I'll be right there." I'd head over to the Turners and we'd sit for a little bit and I'd have coffee and a cookie or two, or, on occasion, three, and then go back to work. One afternoon, the phone rang. It was the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Turner. She said, "Pastor, mom just fell to the floor. I've called the ambulance. Our Pastor's out-of-town, and I'm wondering if you could go to the hospital, and could you take me along? Could I ride? My husband's going to meet us there." I said, "I'll be right there." We tore to the hospital, and soon the family gathered. Then the doctor came out and said to her son, "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but your mama passed." His wife started to weep and to wail, and pretty soon she just collapsed in a heap on the floor. Her husband looked at me and said, "She's fallen out." Later on, I learned that phrase was a fairly common term in some of the black community at that time. She fell out. The grief just knocked her to the floor. I immediately went down to the floor with her. I had tears in my eyes. Others joined, and we sort of wept together, right there on the spot. We just wept. And then I prayed. They asked me to say a prayer, and I prayed with them. But I think what really happened there was that I *wept* with them. It was the first time in my life that

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I was freed, I was really emotionally freed, to say, “this makes sense.” This makes sense. I could weep with them and didn’t have to say, “I care about you” or “I’m really sorry.” It was all said in just being together in that one spot with that one thing that was going on with us and between us.

There are many different ways people grieve. If you’re doing some hospital ministry, you may find that somebody, a physician, often a nurse, a nurse manager of a floor will come up to you and say, “you’ve got to get that family to quiet down.” Security is often called. You’ve got a problem family on D-4. Our chaplains and security have got a really good relationship going. Unless it’s a brand-new student who’s just scared out of his wits, with a seasoned chaplain, the conversation will go something like this: Security will say, “what’s going on?” The Chaplain, “We’ve got a family and they’re grieving.” Security, “Sounds like they’re having trouble.” The Chaplain, “Oh, no, everything’s just fine in there. They’re just grieving.”

Sometimes we can get a family to come down to the end of the hall, to a little room. In the emergency department, we’ve got one room which, if we think someone’s going to die and it could bring a large family in, is isolated. We send the body back there so that people can grieve without upsetting the rest of the hospital. But, you sometimes have to become an advocate for people’s grief. One of the things that we’ve noticed is that people from the Middle East will do an almost ritual wailing and will have a very difficult time and express their heart. I think, in the long run, they probably live longer and do better. They express their heart, and until the heart will have its day, nothing else will really ever get going or get fixed again. We need to have the space for the heart to have its day. There are real cultural differences.

In the 1980s, I think it was around 1985 or '88, Loris LeShaun wrote a book called *The Mechanic and the Gardener*. The title of the book says everything. He talks about how our culture is one that likes to fix things. We have self-help books on the shelf. If you have depression, you follow these three steps, if you have a shaky table, you buy a book on shaky tables and you can fix it. We have a whole mentality of that. If you look at how medical protocols are, many of the surgical procedures are really high tech mechanics, albeit really good mechanics. I always tell the medical students, “if on the way home from work tonight a cement truck coming the other way on Route 9 veers over and crashes into me headlong, I want all the pieces of me that are available picked up and brought to the hospital. I don’t want to see a chaplain. I want your best mechanics to be there to see if these pieces can be threaded together and if I can come out of it with any coherence at all. If not, please, call the chaplain and let me alone.”

There’s a mentality that also moves into the pastoral care or the

spiritual care area that we think we have to fix things. There's a strong push I observe as people come into the Clinical Pastoral Education course, often a strong beginning urge to fix things. What do I say when I go in the room? It's a good question, because they want me to have an answer that says something that will fix it. The kind of answers that come out at a time like that are often horrible answers. "He's in a better place now." Or, "God just wants another little angel for the choir." Those kinds of things.

I literally heard that one about two years ago and nearly fell over, let alone the mother, who nearly punched the nurse and then cursed God, to the dismay of her family. I said, "Well, the kind of God who was just expressed to her probably does deserve a good cursing out." Her family was dismayed at what she did, but this mother was distraught when her infant died and that's what she said. But there's this urge to fix things.

I like LeShaun's book so well because my father, in the Midwest, was a mechanic. He fixed Oliver tractors and New Idea farm equipment, and as he drove around the country, he was known as a very good mechanic. He would come to fix things that other people had tried to fix and couldn't and left a mess. As a little boy I rode along with him. I adored him, and I knew a 5/16 box-end or open-end wrench or a socket with a 3/4-inch drive or a 1/2-inch drive. In a way it was like being in surgery when a doctor says, "Scalpel," and somebody hands him one. I was the little kid who ran back to the car and got the 5/8 open-end wrench or the socket or whatever. He'd say, "5/8 socket, 1/2-inch drive." He'd hold out his hand, I'd put it in there and he'd go back and say, "Hold it there awhile; I'm going to need it again." The farmer would sit there and would often talk to my dad and say, "Well, you know, the Mrs. ain't so well." My dad would say, "Oh, really?" "Yep, went to the doctor. She's got this lump and they think it's cancer." "Oh my, well, doggonit, now, well, that's a terrible thing." It was as if he was the roving psychiatrist or therapist for the farmers in the area. His head was always in a combine or a corn-picker or a tractor, and people would just talk to him and tell him the most amazing things. I learned things about sex. I learned many facts of life just listening to some farmer talk to my dad about one thing or another. Especially as I got a little older, I became interested in the stories the farmers would tell about their daughters and sons and their boyfriends and girlfriends. It was quite an education. The point I'm making is while as a good mechanic as he was, my father ended up being a gardener to many people just by listening, just by being present.

Last night, I spent three hours just before dusk in the garden with my wife. We've got a big garden that's at least the size of this room, probably a little bigger. My wife kept saying, "You've got to cut the garden down," because I

added six feet on all sides this year. So we had a slight communication problem there. But it looks wonderful, it looks just wonderful. You know, you put all that work into it. You do some work with a garden, but when you're done, nothing happens unless there's sunshine and earth and water coming together, and something blesses those plants and they take off. And you just stand back. The idea of gardening is very important to me. I often tell my students, "You garden, you're there, you're present, you tend, you create a safe space, you sit back and you're amazed. Some morning, all of a sudden, that tomato plant grew about six inches overnight. You thought for a long time it wasn't going to grow at all, and it just took off."

These things happen, and I see that growth with my students sometimes. They struggle. They're in angst. They'll say, "send me to another floor, I don't want to go back there," and a couple of days later they come back and say, "I did it." All of a sudden they've mastered something. I could only create the space. It was what was going on in their soul and God's ear, and somewhere in between, that happened.

The first strong image I would give you is: think about gardening. Some people don't like to garden. They say they don't have a green thumb and all of that, but, I think in this work, for this kind of ministry, the gardening image is a very, very important one. Your abilities are extremely limited even if you're the best pastoral care provider there is, your abilities are extremely limited. You can only do so much and then you have to wait.

When you have a lot of students around, you can have some very humorous things happen once in a while which, at the time, aren't so funny. A student walked into a room with one of the chaplains. Understanding that the person was dead, she just walked in and the family was there. They said, "Thank you for coming. Would you pray?" Rather than saying, "What would you like me to pray for," or "Tell me what's happened here," she just jumped into prayer saying, "He's now with God," and so forth. At the end of the prayer, the supposedly "dead" man said, "Well, I'm not quite there yet." The chaplain came streaking back to the office at full speed. "I think you're going to fire me. You're going to throw me out." I said, "Why? What's happened?" The family actually thought it was very funny and they later said to me, "It was just cute." Fortunately, they received it well.

I don't think there's any simple answer to the question of when to name death as a possibility. The one place, though, that I encourage real honesty is to ask a patient, "do you think you're dying?" Are they complaining they're really sick? "What has the doctor told you? Do you think you're dying or do you think you're going to pull through this time?" They'll often tell you what they think.

If a person says to me, "My mother's in such a better place now." I say, "Yes, yes, she is." If a mother says to me, "You know, at least now, he's singing in God's choir," I can put my arm around her and say, "Amen. And he's going to be a good bass. I could hear from his cries. He's going to be a good bass in that choir." I can feel good about that.

When my own mother died, I was sitting by her side. It was no secret she was dying in a nursing home. She had a miserable year, and when she took her last breath, something profound happened to me. [Inhaling loudly] that was her last breath. And then she just held it, and that was it. I waited a couple minutes, and that was it. I remember just kind of going, "Oh, mama."

I remember being about four or five years old in E & W's clothing store in Shreveport. They had high counters with shirts and ties and socks and underwear on them. I was a little boy, shorter than those counters. My mother went around a couple of counters, she was always somewhere else, and suddenly, I couldn't find my mama. I guess I wailed out in the store. I still remember it — "I want my mama" — at the top of my voice.

Well, when she took that last breath, I suddenly had this flashback to the E & W clothing store. You know, I was dealing with loss. I've lost my mother, and this time the clerk isn't going to laugh and say, "She's right over there, sonny." It was different. One of the nurses walked in the room, smiled at me and said, "She's in such a better place now." And I wanted to smack her because I was in the middle of losing my mama. She was 95 years old. So it wasn't like I lost her when I was 20 or 10 or something like that.

A young pastor told me a while back that he buried a woman who was in her mid-90s. The daughter was in her 70s and when she was lamenting, he said, "You know, she was 95 years old." This woman put her finger right in the pastor's chest and said, "Young man, she's still my mother." I think that's an important thing to remember. It's the relationship. It isn't the age. It's the relationship that's the important thing. Professionally, it's one thing when someone tells you that their loved one is in God's hands. That's fine. It's quite another for you to say it first. You can't do that.

As hard as it is to say, it's not all about you. When you're in that room as a pastor, providing comfort and care in grief and loss, it's not about you. One of the big, dominant things is that too often, people end up feeling like they've got to fix it. It seems there's a fix for everything these days, and we want quick fixes, too. Just like in a hospital, if you're there, we have the famous 23-hour package. In hospitals, they try to get you in and out within 23 hours because it makes a whole difference in the funding arrangements. Everything is by how many hours people are in the hospital, so they try to get them out. Everything

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is push, push, push. I think we'd like to do that with grief, too. I expect to see a book on shortening the grief process by these five easy steps, or some silly thing like that.

The author, Savage, contends that people will tell you the same story over and over again until such time as you finally hear it. I've heard so many complaints that I've experienced myself. I've gone to somebody, they tell you the same story every time you go, about their husband and how terrible he was and what a hard life he had and now he's gone and he's not even there to pay the bills anymore and on and on, and every time it's the same story. I say to myself, "I'm going to go over there and listen to her tell about her husband again." One day, having heard the Savage tapes sometime before and thinking about this I said, "You know, I keep hearing this story of your husband. Excuse me, but it sounds like he was just a rotten bastard, wasn't he?" I shook in my shoes as I said it. It got very quiet in the room and I thought she was going to be angry at me. She said, with tears running down her cheeks, "Yes, he was a rotten bastard." I said, "Oh, my," and I took her hands in mine across the table. We were having tea. I just held her hands. I said, "Oh, my. All those years with a rotten bastard." I kept at it. It sounds almost disrespectful now, but I didn't hear her tell that story again and I thought, by damn, he's right. "Rotten bastard" was what it took in that case because she was trying to tell me about this.

I was saying, "It must be difficult to have those memories of your husband," etc. I'm sure I probably said at one point that he must have tried to do his best, or something like that, while he, the rotten bastard he was, probably didn't try to do his best. Can you listen to the story and really, really be in the story and not have to fix it? I couldn't persuade her any more than you could, to be happy. She was angry. It may sound like a cliché, but the only thing I can say with any honesty is that you bless her bitterness. You say, "You are really pissed off. You're really angry. My goodness, you've got a lot of anger. I can hear what a life you've had that you have so much to be angry about." She never went into the details, no sexual abuse stuff or physical violence directly, but she included enough information that it would be believable. But the minute I could affirm "rotten bastard," she was able to release her emotions. We could incorporate into the prayers with which we ended our visits her experience with this horrible human being with whom she'd lived, and pray that she would recover from this wound, this hurt. She was given the dignity of somebody who believed her.

Working with people who actually are dying is my bailiwick. I'm not going to call in a therapist except under very unusual circumstances. It could be that they are having some kind of a dream that could be interpreted or could be worked with, but generally speaking, I would think that we would walk with

those people to the end. When working with someone who has much more of their life in front of them or around them, I would recommend that you do up to four sessions with them. If it looks like you're not getting anywhere with someone who is seriously depressed or has a serious problem, it's probably a wise thing to make a referral at that point.

As with the woman and her "rotten bastard" husband, there are many elderly people who will tell you the same story week after week after week. I think it's because nobody wants to hear it, and if they do hear it, they want to sugar-coat it and move on. It's as if the person continues to say, "I've got this big burning thing in my life and nobody wants to hear it. I'll tell him one more time." Then you go home and say, "I've heard it one more time!" To me that's very different from somebody who says they're feeling very depressed or they're having suicidal feelings or anxiety attacks, and our interventions don't seem to touch it right away, then it's time to pass it along.

I started at Albany Medical Center, by the way, on April Fools' Day in 1996. On my second day at Albany Med, one of our priests walked into the office and he spoke with very colorful language. I won't repeat all he said, but he said, "I was thrown out of a room today. The nerve of the guy!" He said, "Get the hell out of here!" I said, "What happened?" He said, "I went in. I said, 'I'm a chaplain here at the hospital. I'm Father so-and-so.'" And he says, "Get the hell out of here!" I said, "Wow, you did that man a real service." He looked at me like I was nuts, which may well be. I may be certifiable, but I said, "No. Everyone else who comes in that room, he's got to listen to. They say, 'Open your mouth, we're going to give you a shot. We're going to do this. We're going to do that.' Finally, there was someone he could throw out of the room. You did him an enormous favor.

He thought that was really crazy. Two days later he came to me and said, "I can't believe it, but that man called me into the room today as I walked by. And he asked, 'What do you really do here, and who are you?' And then he said, 'You know, I was pretty upset the other day — the last thing I need is some God talk.'" The priest asked the man, "What do we want to talk about then?" And he said, "What about that theologian Shádán?" And the priest said, "I happen to know that book, I've read his work." They ended up talking theology about Shádán for days. It was remarkable, but it started a relationship which began when he threw him out of the room. We don't need Suzie Sunshine as a chaplain. Sammy and Suzie Sunshine are not necessarily going to make great chaplains.

I've found some Sufi work lately, Sufi poems. They have just been wonderful. Hafiz, who wrote "The Gift," is the person I have come to really like.

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Rumi has a poem about the city of Saba. As I think about the culture of the United States and Western Europe, about the denial of death, one of the things we're facing on a very profound theological, pastoral care level is the denial of death.

There is an abundance of wealth in the city of Saba. Everyone has more than enough. Even the bath stokers wear golden belts. No one need do anything. Huge clusters of grapes hang down in every street, brushing the cheeks of the citizens as they pass by. Everyone has more than enough. You put a basket on your head and walk through the vineyard and the orchard, and it fills itself with overripe fruit falling down into it. Stray dogs wander through lanes filled with tossed-out scraps with barely a notice. The lean desert wolf gets indigestion from the over-rich food. Everyone is fat and satiated. There is no crime in Saba city. There are no robbers. There is no energy for crime or for gratitude, and no curiosity about the unseen world. The citizens of Saba grow bored with the mention of Providence. All they have is some idle curiosity about miracles. But that's it. This over-richness is a difficult disease to diagnose and cure, for those who have it are blind to see its cause, and deaf to anyone who would explain it to them. The city of Saba cannot be cured from within. There is a remedy, an individual medicine, not a social cure. One must be very quiet and listen until you hear a voice that says, "Be more quiet. Give up your speaking, your power, your excessive money. Listen to the prophets and the teachers who were not born in Saba. Only they can help you to become fresh and fragrant again, wild and sweet and grateful for the smallest incident."

I think about the materialism that has just swept over us. Many things are measured by the quality of and by how much we have. Much is better. We've moved in that direction.

There is an enormous, enormous resistance to death, the thought of death and talk about death. In my experience, when people get to the end of their lives, their families or they, themselves, more and more are indignant. They're angry to think that life ends. They're shocked. How can this be? People will shout, literally, shout at me in the room. "How can this be? They're dying!" The person may be frail and have had health problems for a long time, they may be in their eighties or nineties, and here come the children saying, "This is wrong! What's wrong with God that this will happen?" We have so moved out of the understanding that everyone who was born comes to the close of their days. I think we pay a terrible price when we deny that.

I was so privileged as a child to live in a small town in Illinois where, when there were deaths like my cousin's, we went to the funeral. I went to hundreds of funerals before I left for college. I remember that my dad lifted me up and I reached in the casket and touched Fred Ludwig's hand. I wanted to feel his forehead. My mother always said, "Don't let him do that." I always wanted

to touch their hands and they were always cold and hard. I knew that they weren't in there anymore. I saw that hundreds of times. So it was not a surprise that people died. I now talk to medical students who have never been to a funeral and they're in their mid-twenties to their late-twenties. The first person who dies on their unit is traumatic to them. It is just shocking for them.

Families live in this denial. The other week I visited a member of our church, a dear man who was 91, who had mowed the church lawns, a hard, tough guy who worked in construction. He built a lot of the Thruway through that area. He was an engineer on the Thruway and was known as a very hard-driving guy. He had his gardens and up until his late eighties he was gardening. He kept gardening until he fell over his wheelbarrow so many times they'd have to come out and pick him and his wheelbarrow up and get them started again. Finally, his family forbade him to work in the garden. They nursed him along through illness after illness. He should have died three or four years ago. But he fought and they fought to get more treatment.

About a month ago, he started to get sick again. He called and I went over. It was a Sunday evening and the family was all gathered around — all four children, the grandchildren and some friends. There were probably 25 people in the house. They were all crowded in the bedroom. He was there, stretched out on the bed, his arms out, and he was just covered with a light cloth. I walked in and I said, "Howard. How ya doin'?" He said, "I'm goin' to leave ya." The family gasped. I said, "You mean, you're dying?" When I said "dying," the family gasped. One of the sons looked at me and I said, "So . . ." "Yes," he said, "I'm dying." I said, "When is this going to be?" He said, "Very soon." I said, "Okay, do you have another garden you need to plant first?" "Nope." I said, "Do you need to say anything to any of your children here? They're all standing here. Any word for them?" "Nope. I've said it all. They know I love 'em." "What about the grandchildren?" "Same," he said. He was very brief on words that night. "The same."

I said, "And Esther . . .?" He got very teary-eyed. He said, "She knows I love her. She doesn't want me to do this, but I'm gonna do it, for my sake and for hers." So, I said, "Well, it sounds like you've completed everything." "I have," he said. I said, "Then we should pray, shouldn't we?" He said, "I want you to pray." I said, "I will." I read a couple of Psalms and then prayed and said, "Lord, it's over. He's lived a phenomenal life. He's planted enough gardens. He's said enough words to everybody. He's got nothing left to do, and he's waitin' for the train. He's waitin' for the train." And he said, "I'm waitin' for the train!" The family was stunned. They were just stunned.

I shook his hand and I said, "I get off work at the hospital tomorrow at

about 4:30, so I could be here at about 5:00 tomorrow. You want me to stop by?" He said, "If I'm here tomorrow at five o'clock, I want you to come by." I said, "I will." At 3:10 the next afternoon the phone rang in the office and my secretary said, "They just called to say that Howard died." When I stopped at the house around 5:00, they said, "We can't believe it. He just said, 'I'm going,' and he went." I said, "Finally, he had clear direction. He had a picture in mind. It was time, and no more standing around."

I have often asked people, "Are you dying?" People will look and say, "I think I am." I sat with a woman a couple of weeks ago. Her son was in the hospital. They said she's dying. He went home and then he called back to the hospital and said, "Call a chaplain to go up and sit with her when she dies." He couldn't be there himself. So I went up. It was just getting dark and I said, "Can you hear me? If you can hear me, squeeze my hand." She squeezed it. I said, "I'm the chaplain. If you want me to pray, squeeze my hand twice." She did. I said, I asked her a couple of other questions, and said, "When you were a little girl, did you have supper? Was it supper? Squeeze my hand twice if you had supper." I asked because some people have dinner or something else in the evening. She squeezed it twice. I said, "Oh, Lord, it's suppertime. The lights are going down in the street, the lights are going down in the sky, the windows are starting to lighten up. Doors are opening and mothers are crying out. Mary!" I used her name. "Come home! It's suppertime! Come on in." From all over they come. They come in for supper.

I've used this a number of times. I did it with a child who was comatose, from whom they were removing life support. I talked to the family about this, and they wanted that. You can come to our table, but if you can't make it to our table, there's a place for you to go. You don't have to stay. It's a very, very emotional thing. Anyway, she smiled and mouthed, "Thank you." I knew we were pretty connected. I prayed and then sat with her and read some Psalms and suddenly she took her last breath.

We live in a culture that denies death. I spoke recently in the Albany area. I said:

It was early September and Mayor Jennings was very concerned. People were calling him, saying that on a couple trees in town, they noticed leaves starting to turn a little yellow. He sent a crew out with green paint, they matched the paint to the tree, they painted them, but more and more of the leaves started to turn brown. He kept sending out trucks and the crews were busy with it until it started to get cold and the leaves were going to curl up with the frost. They had to put tents over all of the trees and put heat lamps under the trees. They did that for the whole winter, but then in the spring the leaves started to fall off. They even sent glue guns out with their crew and glued the leaves to

the trees to make sure they stayed green and on the branches where they belonged. But in the spring, they were all dusty and fading. By that time, the trees couldn't grow any new leaves. The trees just died.

In our desperation to preserve life, we are in a real fix in our culture. We can keep people in existence for a long time, long after their life is gone. I make a theological distinction between existence and life. I think we live in the city of Saba, where we have conditioned ourselves culturally by-and-large to believe there ain't no such a thing as death. We're just going to ignore it. We're going to stay really busy. I think we lose profoundly in that.

Every night when I leave the office, I say to my students, "I hope to see you tomorrow. Have a good life." It happened last week, when I said it the first day of class. The new interns who had just started their 10-week course were all asking, "What's wrong? Is something going to happen to you tonight?" I said, "It could. It could." I don't mean to be morbid about it, but I do think that we teach, as the Psalmist says, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." To number our days means that our days are somewhat numbered. To me, it adds an enormous sacredness to life to know that I have this day with you.

This day, I came down here to be with cantors. My goodness, what a day! And I'm alive long enough to do it. I'm here, and you're here, and we're here. It seems that we lose so much when there is this overabundance, and existence it loses its preciousness and its quality. I'm sure I'm a big victim of that, but I'm also blessed that I had a lot of experience that went the other direction. It's present in our Christian community — enormously so. I think it's probably present for you, as well, in your culture and faith. That's one of the big, big concepts that I wanted to share with you, that I see as really important.

The stages of death really do happen. This may seem so obvious, but denial, depression and all these kinds of things are real. If you're working with a person or a family, they may criticize you up and down for not using a certain prayer or for coming too late or too early or something. In the hospital, they will find fault with a nurse or a doctor or a chaplain. What amazes me is that all the people involved are trying to be so rational about it to prove that they did a good job, when it's not about that at all. What it's about is that the family has to be angry at something, and so they are. They just come up with rage because they're angry.

I saw a young man who was told that his child had a brain tumor that was malignant. I'd been assured that it's of the rare kind that is treatable and that the child had an outstanding chance of having a very normal life expectancy. But when the father heard this, he punched the wall in the ER and kept punching it until the bones were sticking out of his hand. They called security

and they called me and I ran down and spent time with him. We were able to channel his rage and his anger in some other direction. But the stages of death — they're real things and they work themselves out in practical, little ways. When you're trying to be a good cantor, a good pastoral care provider, a good visitor, and they're upset with you or they're griping about something, there's anger there. Hello? Anger is part of what it's about. It really does exist.

There are things I might not want to live without. It would be really hard for me to have to adjust not to see. I might be able to do that, but it would be really hard. Think of a woman who has lost her sight. She has somebody who visits her once a week — her daughter. She lives in a nursing home and she can't walk. In the same situation I, too, might say to you, "I want to die." I had a parishioner just recently who shook her finger at me when I came in one day and she said, "You'd want to die too if you were in my circumstances." I said, "You know, Edna, I think you're right. I think you're right. Frankly, I think I would." Then she said to me, "Do you have Kevorkian's phone number?" I said, "I don't. I think he just got out of prison. You could probably Google him and find it. Get your daughter to Google him, but," I said, "I can't contribute to that. What I can do is to make sure with you that you would have no extra treatment so that if you get an infection or something, you can die."

I would say that in some situations, what you do is to embrace their wish. This is their firm wish. When they called me yesterday, I told my daughters the same thing I've told them in the past. If I get really sick like that, come and visit me. Stay a long time, but be sure to be standing on my oxygen tube. Existence is one thing. We can help someone to exist for months, unconscious for years. To me, that's not life.

#### One quick Hafiz poem:

A wine bottle fell from a wagon going through the field and broke open. That night, 100 beetles and all their cousins gathered to do some serious binge drinking. Soon they began to pound on seed husks like drums and to whirl, and this made God very happy. Then, the night candle rose in the sky and one drunken creature, for no apparent reason, laid down his music and said to his friend, 'What shall we do about that moon?'

It seems to Hafiz that too many people are laying down their music to take up utterly foolish things. In speaking to you as cantors, I say, "don't set down your music. It's lovely."

It was an honor to be with you this day. Thank you.

## Spirituality

Rabbi Jonathan Slater,  
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The themes of the two days of my portion of the “Spirituality Track” are captured in the titles of each day: “The Application of Mindfulness Practice to the Performative Dilemma,” and “Sustaining the Relationship between *Sh'lach Tsibbur* and Congregation.”

We begin by singing a niggun taught by R. Dovid Zeller ה'ג: “I am alive.” It is based on a teaching of R. Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, the author of *Me’or Einayim*. In that teaching, he makes the point that in any moment it is possible to connect with the very concrete, immediate sensation of being alive as a way of waking up to a larger truth: the experience of aliveness is a direct experience of divinity in the moment. It is our capacity to connect with the awareness that will allow us to align ourselves so that we might most perfectly serve as *Sh'lach tsibbur*. The challenge is to become aware of awareness, to realize where our thoughts and attention are, and train them to return to the immediate moment and to God.

We then turn to the texts in the handout packet, “Application of Mindfulness.” The first text (*No’am Elimelekh*), establishes that we sing most fully and truly when the *Sh’khinah* sings through us. Our capacity to get our ego and busy thoughts out of the way, we will more likely become a proper vessel for the *Sh’khinah*. In the end, the text suggests that those moments when we are able to sing in this manner are like *t’chiyat ha-meitim*.

### *No’am Elimelekh of Lyzhansk — Likkutei Shoshanim* "Sing to God, chant His name" (Ps. 68:5)

It seems to me that “song (*shir*)” is feminine as it is connected to the name “God” (*elohim*), which is feminine. “Chant” (*zamru*) is masculine, as it is connected to the name *YHVH*. In the future, song will be renewed and it, too, will ascend to the level of *YHVH*, as in “Sing to *YHVH* a new song” (Ps. 96: 1). This indicates that “song” will be renewed in the future so that it can be sung to *YHVH*, and it will attain that level.

Now, the level of “chant,” which is a high level, is masculine, and we have to exercise great care not to be prideful when we engage in this level. We have to be very careful that this “chant” will be as if the *Sh’khinah* herself were speaking through us. Isaiah said, “Chant *YHVH*, for He has done gloriously” (*gei’ut asah*) (12:5). Note carefully: it says “chant *YHVH*” where we would have expected “chant to *YHVH*.” But, the psalmist here wanted to say that the level of “chant” appears as if God is actually chanting, as if the *Sh’khinah* herself were chanting through us. The verse continues to explain why we need to exert

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ourselves and exercise so much care: “for He has done gloriously.” Because God has done gloriously, and expressed this pride in the world, we have to be careful regarding this quality.

“It has been taught [R. Meir said]: ‘How do we learn of resurrection of the dead from the Torah? From the verse, “Then (אַז) shall Moses and the children of Israel sing this song unto the Lord” (Ex. 15:1): not “sang” (*shar*) but “shall Sing” (*yashir*) is written; thus resurrection is taught in the Torah.’” It is then (אַז), in the future, that Moses will sing this song (*shirah*), which is feminine, “to *YHVH*.” At that time song will be renewed and raised to the level of *YHVH*, the masculine. So, in our verse we have “Sing to God” (“song” is related to the name “God”) “chant to His name” (“chant” is related to the holy name *YHVH*), and it is for that reason that the psalm does not say “chant **to** His name.” This requires great effort and care, so that the *Sh'khinah* can chant through our very throats.

The second text (*Or Ha-me’ir*) suggests that we reveal through our singing, the whole of who we are. We cannot — and perhaps should not — seek to hide our inner life from ourselves or from others. Indeed, the more we seek to hide, the more our lives will be spelled out on our faces. And, we will betray the purpose of our creation, failing to bring joy, to create joy through our voice.

### *Or Hame’ir — R. Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir, Ha’azinu*

This is how we should understand the verse “Rejoice, I will rejoice in *YHVH*” (Is. 61:10). “Joy” (*sos*) itself has no independent capacity, and this is how you can tell: we have seen that even bad people can take joy, and delight the *k’lippot* with it, committing two evils at once: to himself and to joy. That, then, is what our verse is pointing to: “Rejoice, I will rejoice in *YHVH*”—I will bring delight into the quality of joy (*sos*) so that it will enjoy delight and pleasure, through the joy of performing a *mitzvah* which delights God and man (as I have explained above). And, we can do that with regard to all pleasurable things, because they all desire that some wise and righteous person will take pleasure in them, because he knows that their place of origin is in the supernal realms. Therefore, he will set his heart on raising them to their origin and root.

In this, we learn the principle: everything depends on human inner, spiritual awareness, which can be directed in fear and love, so that all acts can be performed correctly, everything to repair the supernal realms. These sorts of people do not sense any personal pleasure in the act. According, then, to the degree of attachment of their soul to God and the depth of their awareness, they can bring supernal light into the letters of their study and prayer and *mitzvot*. Whatever pleasurable activity to which they turn is pulled, drawn after the depth of their holy awareness, which is good for them and for this activity. These activities derive delight and experience elevation (but, the opposite leads to descent).

So, the way it works: created things and pleasures have no independent capacity, but they await the arrival of a wise person to bring light into them through their pure inner, spiritual awareness. Give ear to this analogy. A violin is created so that it can be played. From the notes that emerge from its strings we experience pleasure, for its tone is pleasant and sweet to its listeners. Joy is aroused in their hearts by its music, and they are even moved to dance. Now, if the listeners are wise, and they get up to dance to the music of the violin, the violin rejoices in the joy of this righteous one. But, the opposite will be the case with a bad person. He will be aroused by the sound of the violin to sinful infidelity and the like. Woe to him, but also woe to the violin who leads him to these acts.

The above proves that the music itself has no independent capacity except for that light which we bring into it. This echoes the teaching of the sages (Sanhedrin 101a):

Our Rabbis taught: He who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and makes it like a song, and one who recites a (Biblical) verse at a party in an inappropriate time, brings evil upon the world. Because the Torah girds herself in sackcloth, and stands before the Holy Blessed One and says before Him, “Sovereign of the Universe! Your children have made me like a violin upon which scoffers play.” He says to her, “My daughter, when they are eating and drinking, how else shall they occupy themselves?” She says before God, “Sovereign of the Universe! If they possess Scriptural knowledge, let them occupy themselves with the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings; if they are students of the *Mishnah*, with *Mishnah*, *halakhot*, and *aggadot*; if students of the Talmud, let them engage in the laws of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles on the respective Festivals.”

Those scoffers certainly do not bring light into the violin, to bring it delight! In fact, they bring it great suffering, for they aroused themselves to sinful infidelity and the like and brought the violin down. In this vein, I heard this teaching in the name of the Baal Shem Tov: he once heard a bad person playing the violin, and from that he knew all of the sins this person had committed from the time he was born. Now, if our sins are made known through a violin, how much more so when we sing! From the song that we sing, a clear-sighted, discerning person can know what we have done and all of our misdeeds, because we bring all of our effort into the song we sing. If this is the case, then it is a strong warning to hazzanim and musicians to remove that mask of humiliation from your faces when you sing before the wise and discerning, and particularly when you stand before the *amud* in a synagogue or study hall. Do you not see that you otherwise call attention to your own disgrace? Your own mouth accuses you, making all known through your singing.

The third text (*Ma'or Vashemesh*) establishes what it is that most often prevents us from connecting to our true purpose: our connection to our ego in all of its

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forms. That is what stands between our true selves and God.

***Ma'or Vashemesh — R. Kalmonymus Kalman Epstein of Krakow, Bo***

We should now try to understand why it is that God commanded us to recall the exodus from Egypt every day. Surely it is a great *mitzvah* to recall the magnitude of the miracle that was performed for us. But, what is the purpose of remembering? When the Holy Blessed One created all of the worlds, God's primary intent was that there then be creatures who might come to know that it is God Who brings existence to all existent things. God pours out vitality into all things, and if (heaven forbid) God's vital force should be withdrawn from any thing for even a second it would cease to exist. That is the significance of the verse "God's sovereign rule is over all" (Ps. 103: 19).

Therefore, the purpose of our devotions is so that we might come to perceive that all things, all creatures, everything that exists, persists only because of God's vital force in it, to know that we cannot perform even the slightest movement except for God's attention. We cannot take any credit even for the Torah we study or the *mitzvot* we perform, since we do not act, only God. I have heard this from *tzaddikim* on the verse: "It is good to chant hymns to our God (*ki tov zamrah leiloheinu*)" (Ps. 147: 1); this means that God Himself is chanting! Anything that we do is ultimately from God. And, surely, when we understand this completely, we submit ourselves to God.

We know ourselves to be null and nothing, yet, through this we perceive the wisdom of Torah fully, and we connect completely with God. This will never be the case when we are prideful at all, saying "I am wise" or if we hold that we have any superlative quality at all-instead we separate ourselves from the Holy Blessed One. This is surely the case when we are prideful regarding secular matters, but it should go without saying that if we consider ourselves to be true "servants of God" that we separate ourselves from the Holy Blessed One. Indeed, our pride becomes a wall that separates us from our Heavenly Parent, as the sages taught (*Arakhin* 15b):

"Further did R. Hisda say in the name of Mar Ukba: Of him who slanders, the Holy Blessed One says: "He and I cannot live together in the world," as it is said: "He who slanders his friend in secret I will destroy; the haughty and proud man, him I cannot endure." (Ps. 101: 5). Do not read: "Him (*oto*) I cannot endure," but "with him (*ito*) I cannot endure [to be together]." Some refer this to the arrogant."

Now, I heard this teaching from the holy rabbi Yechiel Mikhel of Zlotchov, an interpretation of the verse, "I stood (*anokhi omeid*) between God and you" (Deut. 5: 5). When we consider ourselves to be some sort of important person, we create a separating wall. That is the sense of "I" (*anokhi*): when I am prideful, speaking of myself as if "I am someone of elevated qualities," that very thing "stands between God and you." It is thus that we create that separating wall.

The last text (*Ma'or Vashemesh*) touches on this issue from the point of view of emotional awareness. There are lower fear and higher fear. The former keeps us locked in our own ego worlds, cut off from God and song. When we raise our consciousness to the higher fear, awe and humility before God's greatness, we are truly able to sing. We are most able to raise our consciousness out of faith in God's love. This, too, leads to an experience like *t'chiyat hameitim*.

*Ma'or Vashemesh*

***R. Kalmonymus Kalman Epstein of Krakow), Beshallach***

“And when Israel saw the wondrous power which *YHVH* had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared *YHVH*; they had faith in *YHVH* and His servant Moses. Then Moses and the Israelites sang” (Ex. 14:31-15:1) Pay attention: why did the Israelites require “faith?” Hadn’t they witnessed God’s strong hand!? Other commentators have struggled with this, and we should also pay attention to the midrash (Ex.R. 23:1):

“Then (*az*) Moses sang.” It is written, “Your throne is established of old (*mei'az*)” (Ps. 93:2). R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Abbahu: “Even though ‘from eternity You have existed’ (ib.), still Your throne was not firmly established, nor were You known in Your world before Your children recited the Song.” This is the meaning of, “Your throne is established of old.” This can be compared to a king who waged a battle and was victorious, and the people then proclaimed him emperor. They said to him: “Before you waged the battle, you were merely a king, but now we have proclaimed you emperor.” What difference is there between a king and an emperor? A king is depicted on the tablets as standing, but an emperor as seated. This is what the Israelites said: “Truly, before You created Your world, You existed, and even after You created it You were still You, but (as if it could be said) You were standing,” as it says, “He stood, and measured the earth” (Hab. 3: 6); “But, since You stood at the Sea and we recited the Song before You with the word *az*; Your kingdom was confirmed and Your throne established.” Thus we read, “Your throne is established by *az*,” that is, by *az yashir*.

This midrash is confusing! Why was God’s kingdom not confirmed until the people sang the Song beginning with *az*? To explain this, we need to understand that “song” arises in response to joy. Someone who experiences joy sings and offers praise. But, someone who is filled with fear — especially a big fear (because great and powerful fears can befall us) — surely this person is unable to offer up a song. Song only arises in response to love and joy. Now, at that moment at the Sea, Israel had the quality of “fear,” as it says, “the people feared *YHVH*.” It is therefore clear that they could not offer up song, since they were not experiencing joy. But, they did long for the realm of love and joy that would be revealed to them in the future, and they would then sing a song in love and joy.

By merit of that faith, they merited immediately to attain the level of love

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and joy, and immediately sang their song. This is the sense of the phrase, “Trip down from *Amana*’s peak (*tashuri meirosh amanah*)” (Song 4: 8). By merit of the faith that they had in God that they would surely gain the level of love, they came immediately to that level, and at once began to sing. That is what our original verse said: “when Israel saw the wondrous power” they were filled with fear (as it says: “the people feared *YHVH*”), and they were not able to offer up song. But, the verse continues: “they had faith in *YHVH*;” and immediately: “Then sang.” That is, they had faith that even though in this moment they were filled with fear, nevertheless they might merit in the future to come to love, and then (*az*) they will sing with great joy.

This is related to Rashi’s comment that “this is proof that resurrection of the dead is taught in the Torah.” When Scripture says “then (*az*)” it points to the future. God’s intention in that moment was that the people should experience great fear yet still have faith in Him. Therefore God gave them a wonderful gift right away, and they were able to offer song with joy.

On the second day, we will consider the two texts not as answers but as questions: How can we establish relationships with the people in our communities of deep mutuality, interdependence and care — out of which true prayer can arise?

### ***Mekor Mayim Chayyim on Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Noah #23***

We find this in the book *Or Hachokhmah, B’ha’alot’kha*:

I learned this from the Baal Shem Tov. It once happened that he was leading the *davening* with his associates in a *minyan*. His fellows did not take so long as he, finishing their *Amidah* long before him, and they waited a long time on him. But, as their wait grew longer each one turned to do his business, and after a while they came back and gathered in the synagogue and waited for him to finish his *t’fillah*.

Afterwards the Besht said to them: “You caused a great rift when you went to your affairs and left me alone.” He offered them a parable: “We know that birds migrate in the winter to warmer climes. Once, someone in one of these warmer countries saw among the returning birds one that was so beautiful, adorned with feathers of every different color. No one had seen anything like it ever. The bird was roosting at the top of a very tall tree, so high up that no one could reach it. When the king heard of the bird, he ordered that many people be brought together, and had them stand one on the other’s shoulders. In this way, finally, the highest one would be able to reach the bird and bring it to the king. When the people were standing in this manner, one on the other, the ones on the bottom began to scatter hither and yon, and the ones higher up fell and got hurt. Their efforts became a laughingstock, and they accomplished nothing. The king’s true intention had been that they would =all be connected

one to the other.”

From this we learn the importance of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We have to create a strong connection with others, so that we are bound together in love and affection, and there is no separation among us. In this light, the Besht continued: “It was good when you were connected with me in prayer. But, when you left me alone, and each of you went your own way, everything collapsed. That which I had hoped to accomplish flew away from me.”

He clarified the matter further: “Since God created the world through the letters of the Torah, and all worlds were created through the Torah, they all stand one on the other, one flowing down from the other. This is how it is with the Jewish people as well. They all have the root in the letters of the Torah, and they have to be always connected one to the other. They also have to be connected with those above them, and all with great love. Just as the Torah is one, complete and whole, so too must Jews be one, complete and whole with each other. With this they have great power to bring down great blessings through the one above them, the one who is closer to the supernal love. But, you all went your separate ways, to take care of your individual concerns. It would appear as if, when you were praying, you did not feel sufficient love among you. And, it appears even more that you did not have any love for the one above you. That is why everything was ruined. The remedy: love between people, bound in a full connection, and also a tight connection to the one above them, so that he can attain that supernal love, to bring it down to everyone.”

*Or Hamei’ir — Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir, T’tsaveh*

Our lesson is grounded in the words of King David (Ps. 119: 11): “In my heart I treasure Your word, so that I will not sin against You.” That is, the words of wisdom and instruction that I preach before the community I treasure in my heart, for my own sake in serving God. Understand this in light of the image: “When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice addressing him” (Num. 7: 89) (that whatever Moses spoke to the people, he understood was addressed to him as well, as the *Sh’khinah* is speaking through him). The purpose of holding my consciousness in this manner is “so that I will not sin against You,” in that my words or Torah and instruction will not lack a proper receiver, and that Your holy letters not be diminished. Surely, anyone who trespasses against the covenant of the mouth will ultimately trespass the sexual covenant as well.

These words apply, as well, to the *Sh’li’ach tsibbur* when he or she leads prayer. How very careful they need to be, and cautious with their words! The *Sh’li’ach tsibbur* stands in the position of the *tzaddik*, the foundation of the world, directing the divine flow to the *Sh’khinah* the totality of the prayers of the congregation. We can understand this from our own experience from sexual intercourse. The sexual organ becomes the focus of all the whole body, and through that organ all others direct their energies toward the partner. Even after orgasm, when the rest of the body is no longer engaged, the partners

remain coupled and they continue to share the feelings of connection and exchange.

Another example: consider a funnel, which is broad above and narrow below at the spout. We can see that even after the liquid has flowed out of the upper section, in the spout some remains, a drop here or there still dripping from it until it stops dripping. These examples should concentrate the attention of a prayer leader who serves as *Sh'lach tsibbur*: even when the congregation seems to have concluded and its impact subsided, the leader must still make the effort with all of his or her awareness and great arousal to continue to pour forth the totality of their prayers to the *Sh'khinah*.

Indeed, I heard this in the name of the Besht: it is a great transgression of the congregation to continue praying when the *Sh'lach tsibbur* no longer wishes to sustain the *niggunim* and wants to conclude some portion of the prayers. In this they inhibit the capacity of the *Sh'lach tsibbur* to direct their prayers. If the *Sh'lach tsibbur* has to wait until they finish their prayers, one way or the other his or her awareness will slacken. As they proceed in prayer, the *Sh'lach tsibbur* will not be able to attain focused awareness to direct prayers to the *Sh'khinah*. Therefore, it is very important for the congregation to be attentive, to make sure that they don't bring this about, and so lose the good that might be gained.

## President's Report

*Hazzan Joseph Gole*

My dear colleagues, I will be brief. I feel very fortunate and blessed to be President of this amazing organization. What makes it so amazing is the talented professionals and my fellow officers which make my experience so rewarding and gratifying. From Martha in our Akron office to Jay in our New York office, whatever the task that needs to be completed, it is done professionally and competently.

Our placement under Robert Scherr's direction runs smoothly and competently resulting in an improved relationship with United Synagogue and the various other wings of the movement.

Eric Snyder is the key to our everyday operations and while he is considered part-time, I know personally that he is working on our behalf 24/7. Eric is competent, responsive and always wanting to help out and do the right thing for the Assembly.

I spoke briefly about Rebecca Carmi before. She is a tremendous addition and asset to our organization. She has far exceeded our expectations in her first year working on our behalf.

Finally, I come to our Executive Vice President, Stephen Stein. Stephen is always about doing the right thing—*Derekh Eretz*. He is an effective ambassador on our behalf to the arms of our organization. He has skillfully developed the most positive relationships we have ever had with the Jewish Theological Seminary and Arnie Eisen, the Rabbinical Assembly and Joe Myers, and the LCCJ Board. Stephen is always there for all of our colleagues and especially in their time of need.

I also want to report to you that your officers devote tremendous time and energy to the Cantors Assembly. David Propis continues to put countless hours into our ongoing CD project with United Synagogue. Nancy Abramson is very involved with Robert Scherr in our placement. Jack Chomsky has been working very hard in areas of community relations and education. Alisa Pomerantz-Boro has helped to revitalize her region and has been involved in numerous fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Assembly. Abe Mizrahi is working on a new project with Craig Taubman that you are all going to be hearing about shortly and is always an ambassador for our organization to the world. So I am happy to report to you that the state of our Assembly is sound, vibrant, full of energy and working tirelessly on your behalf.

I'm happy to report to you that this past year we have developed a new website which you saw earlier this morning. This website will continue to be

expanded to meet our ever-increasing needs.

Since last year, the Cantors Assembly has contributed \$100,000 to the State of Israel and to Israel's Air Force. Hopefully this coming year, on our trip to Poland and Israel, we'll be able to see the new dedication of the memorial to those pilots that fell in defense of the State of Israel.

Under Nate Lam's direction, we are working on an historic event which you heard about earlier – our mission to Poland and Israel.

Finally, the officers, under the direction of Rebecca Carmi, are working on a new vision of our organization. We are bringing an outside consultant in to help us raise significant funds for projects. In the weeks to come, we are all going to be working on this vision together. It will include our becoming the authoritative source for Jewish prayer and the preservation of Jewish music. We want to build interfaith bridges through music. We want to develop and provide healing services. We want to work with the next generation of college campuses and beyond. We want to develop a partnership between Cantors and Jewish music composers to develop engaging and innovative services. We want to bring music and liturgical expertise to small communities. We want to continue to support and expand our sacred calling and profession.

Now that I am in my second year and am now a lame-duck president, I have no fantasy about completing the tasks I just outlined. However, I do promise you, each and every one of you, that I will do all in my power to forward our vision, expand our horizon, and to, in some small way, make a difference which is for the betterment of the Cantors Assembly.

## Regional Reports

### Connecticut Region

*Hazzanim Deborah Katchko-Gray,  
Sanford Cohn:*

Our region is slowly being reborn with more regular gatherings. It had been several years since any CA regional meeting was held, and we're very happy to report that we have had four excellent meetings since the last convention. Our first at Deborah's shul in Ridgefield, CT in July brought 6 members together to share and discuss our future as conservative hazzanim. We realized we have many resources close to us including the Hartt School of the University of Hartford, many synagogues without cantors, opportunities to study, and Cantorial giants in the neighboring New York area.

Our next meeting in December was also in Ridgefield and we had the honor of hosting our Executive Vice President Steve Stein, our President, Joe Gole and Rebecca Carmi, Director of Development and Education. We had a large gathering of 14 from our region. It was a great afternoon of sharing and discussing the rebirth of our region.

We then met in February in Woodbridge, hosted by Josh Konigsberg. We sang some high level choral music with Joseph Ness and discussed the mix of music in our synagogues.

Our last meeting in May was held at Sandy's shul in West Hartford. We had a wonderful turnout of 11 hazzanim from as far as Worcester, MA down to Ridgefield, CT. It was a real sharing and learning together as we each brought music to sing in honor of *Yom Ha-Atzma'ut*. Having JoAnn Rice there to accompany and conduct was a real treat. We opened up this meeting to Reform colleagues in the area and realized they are also isolated and lonely. Most of us in CT work in a vacuum and would benefit from sharing with other Jewish music professionals, including organists, composers, choral directors and other cantors. One choral director in our area did a thesis on "Hebrew Pronunciation in Jewish Choral Music." We have many wonderful resources around us whose expertise can only enhance our own Cantorial knowledge.

We agreed to rename our group, The Connecticut Cantors Association and open it up to our entire state. We will continue to co-chair it and support our Cantors Assembly while sharing with others. Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 28 at 10:30 at Temple Sinai in Newington, CT.

It is important to note the passing of two well respected and wonderful cantors from our region. Hazzanim Irving Pinsky and Y'shaya Grama will be sorely missed in our region and in the Cantorial world. May their names always

be a blessing.

Our goals are to create study and song sessions that are exciting and uplifting. We would like to eventually create a concert that can be moved from *shul* to *shul* and raise funds for the Cantors Assembly. We are just beginning to create a warm and inviting community of cantors and are very excited for our future.

## **Delaware Valley Region**

*Hazzan Stephen Freedman:*

This past year has been a productive, satisfying and financially rewarding one for our region. We began the year last July with our third annual summer retreat in Atlantic City. Close to twenty colleagues attended, many of whom participated in a fundraising concert at Alan Smolen's synagogue in Ventnor, NJ on Sunday evening. The concert, entitled "Jerusalem — Forever Young: Celebrating Forty Years of Reunification," was enthusiastically received by the audience and raised \$2500 for the Assembly. Sessions on Programming for *Shabbat Shirah* by Stephen Freedman and on Music for Pre-School by Mimi Haselkorn and Alisa Pomerantz-Boro were presented. In addition, David Propis and Stephen Stein gave updates from the national office. Thanks go to Ralph Goren, Alisa Pomerantz-Boro and Alan Smolen for planning the retreat and to David Tilman for conducting our ensemble at the concert.

At our opening meeting in October, David Tilman shared reminiscences of his Men's Chorus concert tour in Eastern Europe that previous summer. In January, Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman of Gratz College presented a fascinating lecture entitled "The Musical Interrelationship between America and Israel," anticipating Israel's 60<sup>th</sup>.

March brought us to Alisa Pomerantz-Boro's synagogue in Cherry Hill, NJ for an "Israel at 60" concert. It was a terrific concert, which in addition to being musically satisfying, raised another \$2500 for the Assembly.

In April, we were one of the "collaborating partners" for a day-long symposium sponsored by the Albert Einstein Healthcare Network. The symposium, entitled "Healthy Generations: Mobilizing our Community to Prevent Jewish Genetic Diseases," consisted of a number of presentations by medical personnel, researchers, clergy and individuals affected by these afflictions.

This report is being written in advance of our final concert for the season, an exciting opportunity provided us by the Middle Atlantic Region of the Federation of Men's Clubs. They hold an annual "Golden *Kippah* Concert," the proceeds of which are used entirely to support Camp Ramah in the Poconos.

The concert, entitled “Golden Voices of the Cantors Assembly,” will feature a number of our region’s colleagues in performance. We anticipate yet another \$2500 contribution to the Assembly, making the 2007-2008 season the most successful in terms of fund-raising in recent memory.

Our region has continued to participate in the Conservative Movement Leadership Council of the Delaware Valley Region, a wonderful collaborative effort of the leaders of all constituent arms of USCJ. We have been tackling the issue of youth in our meetings this year, with plans for concrete action during the coming year. We also hope to plan and execute another movement-wide event along the lines of last year’s “Exodus and Egypt” day at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.

I want to thank my co-officers, Ralph Goren and Arlyne Unger, for their continued support and hard work over this past year. They are treasured colleagues, trusted advisors and good friends whom I hold dear.

Our congratulations go to those members of our region who are being recognized at this convention for their fifty-plus years of membership in the Cantors Assembly: Nathan Chaitovsky, Charles Davidson and Isaac Wall. Each in his own way has added immeasurably to our region and to our national organization.

We want to commend our national leaders for their continued outstanding commitment toward furthering the principles and ideals of our Assembly and wish them all continued success in the year to come.

Finally, please mark your calendars and plan to join us for our fourth annual summer retreat to be held in Atlantic City on August 24-25. A detailed description and registration form is included in your convention materials.

### **New Jersey Region**

*Hazzan Estelle Kunoff Epstein:*

The New Jersey Cantors Concert Ensemble of the New Jersey Region has had a very busy year. As part of our outreach to the community at large, we have created our own website: <[www.njcce.org](http://www.njcce.org)> on which our schedule of concerts and some short audio clips are posted. Last year I reported that some of us were able to perform one song at the New Jersey Region United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Biennial Convention. I am happy to report that we have already been invited to sing a ten to fifteen-minute program at next year’s New Jersey Regional Biennial. We also performed last summer in an evening concert at the North American Jewish Choral Festival to great acclaim.

We sang four major concerts this year at: Rodeph Torah in Marlboro, NJ, Neve Shalom in Metuchen, NJ, a concert honoring Cantor Erica Lippitz’s



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twenty years at Congregation Oheb Shalom in S. Orange, NJ and a return engagement at Temple Beth El in Oakhurst, NJ. We also sang concerts for the residents of Daughters of Miriam Jewish Home for the Aged for both *Hanukkah* and *Pesah*. We are excited to be performing at this Cantors Assembly Convention in the evening of music by Meir Finkelstein.

Several of our members were honored this year: Mark Biddelman for 40 years of service at Temple Emanuel of the Pascack Valley, and no less than 3 of our members are receiving honors at this convention: Sheldon M. Levin — the Moshe Nathanson Award for Conducting, Henry R. Rosenblum — the Gregor Shelkan Award for Mentoring and Education, and Sam Weiss — the Samuel Rosenbaum Award for Scholarship and Creativity.

On March 19 we cosponsored a Yom Iyun with the New Jersey Region of the Rabbinical Assembly: "Innovative Inreach: Engaging Our Unengaged Congregants." The featured speakers, Rabbi David Ackerman, JTS Director of National Outreach, our colleague, Cantor Joel Caplan and Program Director, Randi Brokman (both of Congregation Agudath Israel of West Essex), all discussed the challenges of creating relationships, services and programs to appeal to the congregants we rarely see. About forty people attended.

Our final meeting of the year will be another Yom Iyun and installation of new officers on Wednesday, June 25. Our guest presenter, Hazzan Ramón Tasat, will give a lecture with musical illustrations on Piyutim: Internal References, Kabbalistic Influences and Implications. Anyone in the area is invited to join us.

## **Seaboard Region**

### *Hazzan Kim Komrad:*

We began the year with a wonderful presentation by Barry Serota, who informed and entertained us with stories of Ganchoff, Pinchik, Glantz and others. We compared the state of hazzanut in their day to hazzanut in our congregations today.

We sponsored *Mafotir B'shallach*, as part of the CA's *Tikkun Torah* project. Our endowment of \$540 has been completed.

We sponsored half-a-table at the Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning — a program about Jewish education for children with special needs; we displayed materials about Operation Mazal Tov which provides Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation and ceremonies for special needs children in Israel.

We are looking into the idea of organizing a mini-conference or a Day of Study for our region.

The RA convention was in Washington, DC this year, February 10-14. They asked us to lead promenade-style entertainment on Monday evening, February

11. Several members of our region participated in a fun and entertaining musical presentation, and were very well received.

On Sunday, March 9, a concert featuring the women cantors of the Seaboard Region was given as a fundraiser for Torah Fund, celebrating Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

We are engaged in ongoing discussions about the state of Conservative synagogue music and the current push towards more modern music, away from traditional music, and our responsibility, as hazzanim, to keep traditional Jewish music alive.

On May 18 we held a concert at Har Shalom, Potomac, celebrating Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Funds raised will be contributed to the CA Social Action project for the Israel Coalition for Darfur Refugees.

We continue to meet every month throughout the school year. I am proud to say that it has been a productive year, with participation from the majority of the members of our region. *Kol ha-Kavod* to all of our members!

### Tri-State Region

*Hazzan Earl G. Berri:*

The Tri-State Region is getting off to a good start this year. We have some newer members who are very interested in a stronger region. After much discussion, we have decided to change our name from the Tri-State region to the Great Lakes and Rivers Region of the Cantors Assembly. This new name much more reflects our geographical location and content and also represents the same area as the United Synagogue Region. While discussing this name change, a call was made to the CA office in New York. It was discovered that Indianapolis is a member of our region. We are officially annexing Indianapolis and while we are at it, all of Indiana, unless someone objects and will contact our colleagues in that region and welcome them.

The Region has added congratulations to its regional members Hazzanim Meir Finkelstein and Larry Vieder in its full page 2008 convention ad.

During the upcoming year, our region will be hosting a retreat at the Butzel Center (Tamarack Camp) outside of Detroit. After talking with the camp we will be having the retreat in the Spring from Sunday, March 22 until Tuesday, March 24.

The retreat will feature a scholar-in-residence, 20 minute personal recitals, kosher wine tasting and fancy dinners. There will be a concert Tuesday night in Detroit. (Venue to be decided). We felt that this Spring retreat in the Mid-west would go well with the Winter retreat held in California and the Summer retreat held on the East Coast.

Officers for next year were elected: President/Chairman, Earl Berris; Treasurer, Jamie Gloth; and Incoming Secretary, Pamela Schiffer.

Meetings were scheduled for next year: Wednesday, November 12 in Columbus, Ohio hosted by Hazzan Jack Chomsky and Wednesday, January 14, 2009 in Cleveland, Ohio (Visit to Maltz Jewish Museum) hosted by Hazzan Rebecca Carmi.

### **Western Region**

*Hazzanim Mimi Haselkorn,  
Linda Kates:*

The Western Region is so proud of its members. This year many of our members were honored and a few retired with loving words and congratulations.

- Hazzan Yehuda Keller retired after 50 plus years of dedicated service to the Cantorate.
- Hazzan Sue Deutch was honored by Heritage Pointe for service to her community.
- Hazzan Judy Sofer was honored for her Bat Mitzvah year at her synagogue.
- Hazzan Neil Blumofe was honored for 10 years of service to his congregation.

Our annual Western Region conference had over 50 members in attendance. This year we focused on “The Cantor Speaks”, our roles as Hazzan, educator, leader and advisor. We had many talented scholars including Faith Steinsnyder, Nate Lam, Ira Bigeleisen, Mike Stein, Eva Robbins and Rabbi Steve Robbins. We had a fabulous concert at Sun City again this year in conjunction with Lance Tapper’s congregation, Beth Shalom of Bermuda Dunes.

Marcia Tilchin and Judy Sofer in conjunction with Women’s League planned a West Coast concert to commemorate 20 years of women graduates in Cantorial School. It was a great collaboration and overwhelming success so much so that we have been asked to do it again soon.

Thanks to our United Synagogue representative, Mike Stein, plans are in the works for a fundraising concert with United Synagogue at the end of the year.

Save the date!!! January 5-7, 2009 is our annual Midwinter Conference. This year we will be joining our colleagues from the American Conference of Cantors and Guild of Temple Musicians.

## Chaplaincy Track: Life and Death Issues

*Hazzan Deborah Tanzer-Cohen*

*Hazzan Eva Robbins*

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins*

*Hazzan Deborah Tanzer-Cohen:*

Good Afternoon. I'd like to begin my presentation by reading you three quotes:

When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares.

Henri J. M. Nouwen - *Out of Solitude*, 1974

A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD - Kitchen Table Wisdom, 1996

It is about loving  
and caring,  
about giving and receiving,  
of being weak enough  
to be fully human  
and strong enough  
to be vulnerable.

It is reaching out  
to touch another  
with the hand of God,  
and realizing that  
it is the most  
and the best  
we have to offer.

It is about life.

Julia Fisher, CPE Resident, 1996

It would seem from the above quotations that the skills of pastoral care can be boiled down into a very simple formula: Sit down and shut up! That really isn't very far off the mark.

Number one on the list of Seven Essential Principles of Pastoral Care at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital is the following: "Your primary responsibility is to be present and to listen with absorbing interest." Try to place your need to say the right thing or the religious thing on hold as you attempt to hear the emotional content of the other's story.

It is all about STORY. I repeat: It is all about STORY. When someone is gravely ill, or sitting by the bedside of a loved one who is gravely ill, very often what that patient or family member or friend wants and needs to do more than anything is to tell his or her story. What we as pastoral care givers need to do, is create the safe space for them to tell that story. There are some differences in the ways we approach our respective congregants - my areas of the hospital are my congregation - but the basic techniques are the same.

What are those differences?

I am employed by a large inner-city teaching hospital; I am not the Jewish chaplain, but a chaplain who happens to be Jewish. I visit any patient (and family members) who, regardless of faith affiliation or lack thereof, is in need of spiritual and emotional support. I am available to the staff for the same purpose. I usually do not know the faith affiliation of the patient when I first pay a visit, because that information does not show up on the census that I work from. Given the location of JEFF, as the hospital is known, the odds are very good that the patient will be either Catholic or Baptist, in that order.

When you make a hospital visit, the odds are pretty good that the patient is Jewish, that you know the patient, the patient knows you and knows why you have come. When I knock on a door for the first time, the patient has no idea who I am, or often, even once I have introduced myself, what pastoral care is. You might think you have the advantage, but I think not. Here's why.

It is all about how I, and you, as a pastoral care giver, enter a room. The way you or I enter a room sets the tone for the visit. Because of who you are and your relationship to the patient, your agenda is assumed. If I were to walk into the room carrying my little pastoral care handbook, then it could be assumed that I am there for one purpose only, to say a prayer, that I have an agenda, that I am on a mission. Without that little book in my hands, the purpose of my visit becomes less defined. But you, because of your pre-existing relationship with the patient, will have to work much harder to make this pastoral care visit into what we call a meaningful encounter.

I, as a hospital-based chaplain, have another advantage: I will most likely get a chance to visit the patient more than once, unless the patient's stay is very brief. So if our first visit is interrupted, or if there are family members there and the patient feels inhibited by their presence, I get another chance to listen and

to hear the patient's story. That second visit can be much harder for you to manage unless the patient is there for an extended period of time.

Finally, when a patient leaves the hospital, my relationship with that patient comes to an end. That knowledge can be very freeing, allowing a patient to share more with me than a congregant might with you. Of course, when I spend time with a patient and his or her family four or five days a week for weeks and sometimes months, when the patient, thank God, gets better and goes home, or sadly passes away, there is a loss that needs to be grieved. That finality to the relationship has its good points and bad.

How do you change a pastoral care visit from one with an assumed agenda to one that is open-ended, full of the possibility for spiritual and emotional support and healing?

Enter a room with empty hands. Such a simple rule makes so much of a difference.

Gentlemen, put the book in your suit pocket; ladies, if you carry a purse be sure it leaves your hands free. Why is this so important? The pastoral care giver is most likely the only person who does come into that room empty handed and without an agenda. Even most visitors come with an agenda: to cheer the patient up, to make him feel better. Without the book in your hand you are not announcing: I'm here to say a prayer. You are there; that's all. Your hands are also immediately free to hold onto the hands of the other. Your arms are available for the comforting hug.

Enter the room with empty hands.

Next, try to quickly assess what the patient's status is, and unless the situation indicates otherwise, ask if you can sit down. If you remain standing, it is a signal, intentional or not, that your time is limited. To open an encounter with a patient it is important to signal your willingness to do so, by sitting down and bringing yourself to the patient's physical level. The patient has medical staff leaning over him or her all day long. Sit by the patient's side if you can. Staff do recognize the value of pastoral visits and will usually go out of their way to help you.

If there is a family member standing by the bedside, then your place is standing beside that person. If the family member is the focus of your pastoral visit, try to find a place where you both can sit. That indication of your willingness to listen is just as important to the family as it is to the patient, and in many situations, probably more so.

Now comes the hard part — getting the conversation going. It would be so nice if I would walk into the room and the patient would see me and say: "Thank God you are here! I need to talk to someone. I'm so worried and

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frightened. I need to talk all this through with someone and I don't want to burden my children ... and so on." Not that it doesn't ever happen. I met one patient, Mr. S., who was in JEFF for a heart transplant evaluation. (The heart transplant unit is one of the areas of the hospital that I cover). After I introduced myself, he said, "You may not believe this, but I was sitting here, feeling just about as low as I've ever felt, and wondering if this will be worth it all, and who knocks at my door? The chaplain." We went on to have a very long talk about why he wants to have a transplant, about his faith, and about his family. The patient, a devout Baptist, saw the hand of God in that encounter. Not just anybody knocked on his door, but the chaplain did.

Unfortunately, it isn't usually that easy. The trick is to start the conversation without playing twenty questions, because there are enough people asking the patient questions all day long without you or me coming along and subjecting the patient to yet another interrogation. I have no formula to give to you. It is an art, not a science.

What about prayer? Your congregant probably does expect you to make a *Mi Shebeirakh*. I only pray when a patient asks me to, and a *Mi Shebeirakh* isn't usually what my patients have in mind.

Extemporaneous prayer was the bane of my existence when I started Clinical Pastoral Education almost two years ago, and remained that way throughout my first year and into my second. I shadowed one of the summer CPE interns a few weeks before I started and as I listened to her praying with patients, seemingly making it up as she went, I said to myself "Jews don't pray like this! The words are always there for us. How am I ever going to learn how to do this?" Getting comfortable with extemporaneous prayer was a part of at least two of my learning contracts during my five units of CPE.

I was speaking to a more experienced chaplain once — he happened to be an orthodox rabbi — and he asked me "How can you say a prayer for someone if you don't know what he wants you to pray for?" I have kept that as my guiding principle of prayer. If I have listened to the patient, then I will know what to pray for. It still feels very not-Jewish, but I am not, as I said, the Jewish chaplain, but a chaplain who happens to be Jewish. I am not suggesting that you abandon the *Mi Shebeirakh* altogether, but if the moment ever feels right, try to experiment with personalizing your prayer. Pray in English (the heavens will not split asunder). Take what the patient has expressed and incorporate it into your prayer. If it doesn't feel authentic, then you know it isn't for you.

It is all about story, so it seems appropriate that I should share a few with you. Last week, short as it was because of Shavuot, gave me far too many stories to tell.

Mr. P is 52 years old and was diagnosed with a blood cancer about 21 years ago. The cancer has slowly attacked most of his body systems. He is the only child of parents in their late 80s, married to his high school sweetheart, and has one daughter who is supposed to graduate from high school tonight and turns 18 on Sunday. On Thursday, at his wife's request, I attended a family meeting where they were told that it was time to stop treating Mr. P and move to comfort measures only. On Friday I stayed with her again while a hospice company assessed Mr. P and told her that moving him would not be a good idea; the move would cause him terrible pain and he might not survive it. The hospital would provide them with a quiet, private room and give them all the privacy, access and support they needed. What is my role in all this? I've been looking in on this family for several weeks now. Last Thursday and Friday I was Mrs. P's mother/sister/best friend. I held her hand. I was a sounding board for her thoughts. When she could step away from the people she was holding together I held onto her so she could fall apart for a few minutes. I was present.

Mr. T is an 82-year-old with end stage congestive heart failure. This was his fourth visit to JEFF since I started my residency in September, and I have to admit I have become very attached to him. He is a musician, a member of a very well known Philadelphia-based gospel group. He has performed all over the world and with many famous musicians; he has more than a few stories to tell, and he loves to tell them. But one story in particular stands out for me — that is the story he told me about leaving home at age 13 to join this group. I was on call overnight, my pager was mercifully silent and I was able to just sit by his side, hold his hand and listen. He had to work to help support his family and when this opportunity came along he took it, even though he had to leave his mother behind in South Carolina. But it wasn't too very long before he could bring her to Philadelphia to live with him. I said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. T on Friday knowing that I may never see them again. He is going home on comfort care. His group is supposed to celebrate its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a concert at the Kimmel Center in September. He plans to be there and who knows? He has spent his life praising the Lord; I think God owes him one.

Then there is Sid. I'd call him Mr. S, but he doesn't let anyone call him anything but Sid. Sid is 59 and came to JEFF at the end of February to wait for a heart; he got one 21 weeks ago. He didn't have much family or many friends who came to visit. Sid told me last week that when I first came in to see him his reaction was something like "Okay, I don't know what that was all about." Then it was "She's here again?" Then it was "She's here again!" He told me that he would find himself telling me things he never intended to tell me or anyone else, but he sure felt better after he did. Sid is supposed to go home today, but I'll see

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him again, because the transplant patients come in frequently for tests, and usually come up onto the floor to say hello to staff.

One Sunday when I was on duty, I was telling some people what I did. They kept asking “Do you get to sing, do you get to use the Cantorial stuff ever on the floor,” and I was saying, “really, no, that’s so about me, and it’s not about me, there’s so little room for that.” I thought about it for a couple of minutes and I remembered something from the beginning of my residency. About a week into my residency, Jake, one of the heart transplant patients, was transplanted. Shortly before he went home, it was during the *Yamim Nora'im*. He had a couple days to go, but he wasn’t going home before *Yom Kippur* — he would still be in the hospital. I went into his room. After a heart transplant, patients have to wear a face mask or anyone around them has to wear a face mask for about 12 weeks to prevent any infection. So I’m in his room, I’m wearing a face mask, his wife is there and she is wearing a face mask, his daughter is wearing a face mask, and in retrospect it would have been easier if he had put on a face mask so we could have taken ours off, but I’m wearing a face mask and I sang *Kol Nidrei* for Jake, with a face mask! I don’t think I’ll ever sing a better *Kol Nidrei* in my life; I only went through it once. So yes, once in a while, but that was *Kol Nidrei*.

I’d like to conclude with a few words about my experiences as a resident in Clinical Pastoral Education. I’m not sure that if I had completely understood what I was getting into that I would have done it, but I am intensely grateful that I did and that I stuck with it.

When I say that I walk into a room with empty hands, I am speaking literally, but we each carry the baggage of our emotional lives with us into every encounter with a patient and part of CPE is unpacking and understanding that baggage. It took me a long time to understand the transference involved in my feelings for Mr. T. That doesn’t change those feelings, but it helps me to understand them. I know that a situation involving mothers and daughters will probably trigger strong reactions in me, so I’m emotionally alert for that. It is not fun, but it is essential for pastoral care.

Wrestling with theology in a pluralistic setting was another huge challenge.

I didn’t realize until I started CPE exactly how unfixed — shaky really — my own theology was and still is. Where is God in the day-to-day of illness and recovery, of life and death? Our liturgy tells us that on *Rosh Hashanah* our fates are written and on *Yom Kippur* the decrees are sealed. How, literally, do I want to believe that? When I walked into Mr. S’ room that morning, he saw the hand of God at work. I’m not sure I’m ready for that much responsibility. That’s just the tip of the theological iceberg. One of my colleagues once described pastoral

care as bringing God's comforting presence to the sick as Jesus did. My supervisor turned to me and asked, "Well, how does that work for you?" My quick answer: "Same thing, but without the middleman." The reality for me is that on a day-to-day basis I don't think about theology at all. I just try to do the best I can to be of some support to the patients, their families and the staff with whom I come in contact.

I urge you all to look into taking a unit of CPE in a pluralistic, hospital-based setting. It is really hard, but I promise you, you will become better hazzanim, better pastoral care givers and better human beings. Thank you.

*Question:*

What speaks to me is what you said about singing: that it's not about you, and I understand that. But for some of us, maybe it's the best way we can express ourselves, feeling that it's not only for their good but it's something they've heard us sing in the synagogue.

*Hazzan Deborah Tanzer-Cohen:*

Absolutely. There are times when our singing is good. I have sung in the strangest kinds of places. I sang for a woman who grew up in South Philadelphia, which is primarily an Italian-Catholic neighborhood, but at one time did have a lot of Jewish people in it. She told me how she always had neighbors who were Jewish and that she went to synagogue. She asked me to say a prayer, so I sang Debbie Friedman's *Mi Shebeirakh* for her. A couple of weeks later, they were getting ready to move her mother, who'd recently had a stroke, to hospice care. The woman told me how she had been to Israel and gone to the *Kotel*, and had heard people reciting Psalms. This nice Italian-Catholic woman asked me to sing a Psalm for her mother. So I sang Gerald Cohen's setting of Psalm 23.

I've sung lullabies in the Intensive Care nursery to try to get parents just to stand by their baby's crib because they were so frightened of this tiny, little baby. The only nursery we have at Jefferson is an Intensive Care nursery. We don't usually have healthy babies, and when we do, interestingly enough, the parents don't want the chaplains around. If the babies are healthy, stay away. It's a very weird situation.

*Question:*

You spoke about creating your own prayers. I like the idea of taking the *Mi Shebeirakh* and inserting specific needs, even some of the scariest things in the world. How do you know when to give the person hope; how do you know when

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not to give the person hope, but to be realistic with them? Also, in creating your own prayer, you said if it doesn't work for you, you'll know pretty quickly. How does that work?

*Hazzan Deborah Tanzer-Cohen:*

Again, you have to listen. *Mi Shebeirakh* starts out with the healing of the body and the healing of the spirit. That's a very open-ended thing because it's healing, not curing. You have to remember the difference between healing and curing. By remaining very open-ended, the prayer gives you a lot of room. Once you get the hang of it, it's very liberating. Remember, if you use English texts, people will understand what you're saying.

I'd caution against trying to use other people's words, which is what I did most of my first year. I tried to copy everybody else, talking about God's comforting arms around you, etc. I would get so tangled up in this that I felt like an idiot and probably looked like an idiot, too. It took well into the second year for me to find my own feet. What started working for me was using the *Mi Shebeirakh* formula. I started out by saying: "May God who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ..." because it gave me a starting point which I use almost all the time now. Sometimes I'll say: "May God who is full of mercy and compassion ..." Sometimes that seems like the right thing, but it contains elements of the *Eil Malei Rachamim*, which you personally might want to avoid. Once you realize that you really are in your own comfort zone, then no matter what you're saying doesn't sound bad at all.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Psalm 41 assures us that "The Lord supports him (her) on his (her) bed of illness." It's a very important Jewish principle — that the Divine Presence is really there with the patient. It's translated that the *Sh'khinah*, which is the indwelling of God in this world, sits at the head of the bed of the ill person. The Talmud teaches us that *bikkur cholim* is one of the most important *mitzvot* we can fulfill. Rabbi Chanina said that when we visit the sick, 1/60<sup>th</sup> of that individual's pain will be taken away, especially if we are *bengilo*, if we enter in a particular way to visit the patient. This comes from the *shoresh "gil"*, which is a circle, but it also means to have an association with somebody else. This can mean that you're born at the same time, there's something similar, that you share the same zodiac sign, that there's a closeness.

But the problem is that as clergy, we visit lots of people who don't even know us. Ours is a small congregation so we know everyone we visit. But many of you work for large congregations. You'll get a name and you'll go visit someone.

They don't know you or you don't know them. I recently heard about someone who went to visit someone but they had the wrong patient. These things happen in our work.

In order to do what Deborah talked about, you need to walk in with a sense of empathy — the ability to be truly compassionate. But we can't always be that way. We all work very hard, we have stresses, anxieties, things that we carry in our life, that make it very difficult to walk into a hospital room and just be ready to overflow with the kind of compassion and love that's expected of us. Part of what we're going to do today is to deal a bit with the concept of preparing ourselves to walk in through the door, and what that really means.

When I was three, I had my tonsils taken out, and shortly after, I ended up with typhoid fever. I was put in isolation, in Toronto, Canada, which meant that at three years old, I couldn't have my parents come into my room. I could only see them through the glass. It was terrifying. That sat inside my gut, and still does.

I've been married for more than 36 years to this amazing man who's had many illnesses that he's had to deal with, and I've had to deal with them, too. I've had to be a caretaker and a companion, and visit the hospital many times. Eleven years ago, two of our daughters were in a very serious car accident and we almost lost one of them. That was probably the most transformative experience for me as a person and as a hazzan. In fact, what came out of it was our tape, *R'fa'emu*, to help people pre-and post-surgically. We did it because we had a 21-year-old, fourth-year senior in dance, who might not be able to dance again, who we might lose. What did that mean for us? How were we going to be present as parents, but also as cantor and as rabbi?

What we discovered was we needed to prepare ourselves and we needed to prepare her by using rituals, music and meditation. That was my turn to experience the intensity of these illnesses as a family member, and to realize how alone you feel when your own loved one goes through some major medical procedure.

I had one (*b'ezrat hashem*) little surgery. For 24 hours I was so alone. Coming out of the anesthetic is the most unpleasant experience that one can have. Steve and I have worked very hard to support people before, during and after their surgeries. I found that my gift is music. I can hold someone's hand, and I can talk to them, not anywhere near as well as Steve can, but they know that's the gift I have. The handout packet contains a lot of information, including two chapters from my Master's thesis which was on healing.

When I graduated from AJR, we had been doing the work. I knew it was important, but I really didn't know why. I began to do research, going back into

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*TaNaKh*, all the way up to the present, including all the rituals and all the things that we use to create healing for people. You have the benefit of the chapter on *bikkur cholim* which I hope you can use. I gave you the chapter on Psalms, because what I discovered is that there isn't anything more beautiful than those texts. There are phrases throughout *TaNaKh*, but especially in the Psalms, that become the material for a chant, for a melody. I gave you five pages of one-liners. I went through all of them to find the ones that would bring comfort or maybe joy, depending on the need. We're going to do some of the music a little bit later, but I want to focus on how you prepare yourself. How do you have those "empty hands?" How do you walk in with a full heart, empty hands and be totally available for whatever is going to happen?

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

First of all, let me thank the Assembly. It's nice to be here, amongst my friends, the cantors. I began my Rabbinic training in 1960 when I was 16. As my first task as a rabbi, I was given what was supposed to be a part-time synagogue position in a little synagogue in Los Angeles, but it ended up being a full-time job. The first thing I had to do was to handle the suicide of a mother who left three children. I discovered the mother with the children, and instead of letting the children go into a detention center, I took them home with me.

So that's how it started about 50 years ago and it hasn't changed. I found that my job is *tsuris-shlepping*, and it's been an honor and a privilege to be able to be in the midst of difficulty with people of all kinds, whether they see me as rabbi, psychologist, naturopathic doctor or as a healer, which I am, in all kinds of different incarnations in my life.

Along with that, I've been near death five times. The last was in 2005 when my lungs collapsed. Then I ended up with a massive shingles infection which destroyed seven nerve roots in my back. I've lived with pain for three-and-a-half years that turned into muscular dystrophy. I'm telling you this because if you look at me now, you wouldn't think that's what's going on with me. But because of this lady here, my children, my prayer and my meditation, I'm able to sustain myself. I have found that without those elements in my life, I would have died a long time ago. I shifted from the professional view of those skills I learned, to what they mean to me.

I learned the most when I was 19. I almost died from hepatitis and was in bed for a year. The rabbis and the doctors told me to go to bed, said I was going to die, and told me just to wait. I spent a year in meditation and prayer, got up out of bed and went back to school. Were it not for those gifts, it isn't that my body would have died, my mind would have died. My soul would have

withered because it would have had no place to be. That's what the *guf* is, it's a place to be.

I understand that we bring gifts when we enter into the presence of a *choleh*. It's important to understand what a *choleh* is. *Choleh* comes from the word *chalal* which means an absence. Kabbalistically we understand that someone who is sick is suffering from a loss of something which needs to be there. Also, the word *rafeh* means to bind, it means you bind together that absence so that there is no emptiness in the person who is present. An illness is not something that is only physical, it is also something emotional, cognitive and spiritual.

We, as clergy, bring fullness. We bring the capacity to be binders. That doesn't mean saying, "I'm going to heal you," rather it is knowing what to do to be present for the people who are there when they open the door for us, or we knock on it and are able to open it, to find out what the nature of the absence is. And whatever we have to offer, we do it in a way that the person feels that they are receiving the gift we are offering. It requires great perceptiveness, intuitiveness and capacity for empathy, but when done with the kind of strength that gentleness requires, the people who are ill feel held.

In the 50 years I've been doing this, my experience consistently is that there are two responses when I walked in a room. It was either: "Oh, am I that sick?" thinking they were going to die and I was coming to give them last rites; or: "Thank God you're here!" It's one or the other. When I was a chaplain at Cincinnati General Hospital for two years while I taught in the Psych Department and finished my ordination at Hebrew Union College, I would see strangers, regardless of their religious background. When they'd realize you were clergy, their response was either: "I don't believe in God, so why are you here?" or: "Thank God you're here, because I need God." That spread is infinite, and each of us brings to it our own struggles. Do I have answers to give, do I have questions to ask, what are my resources?

Each of you has one incredible resource to which Eva referred. You all have these incredible voices that are not only gifts, but are responsibilities. I've seen what Eva's voice does to those who are sick and dying. It's profound. When we were with our daughter in the emergency room, Rachel's pelvis was broken off her spinal column, and the doctor said she did not have long to live, but we kept her from dying. Part of that was the sound of the voice. It brought her back, gave her strength. That voice that each of you were blessed with is not just an instrument. The instrument is attached to a *lev*, and to a *n'shamah*, which means that you carry within you enormous sensitivity and care. The voice, whether it's in speech or mostly in some form of music, is healing. It's also reassuring.

Many cantors have asked me, "What do I do, when I go to sing?" One

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was the cantor I worked with for 16 years, Boruch Cohon. I worked with him for 16 years when I was the Rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Los Angeles with 1,700 families. It was a lot of work, until I decided I didn't want to do that anymore. This was more fun and more meaningful. Boruch said, "What do I do?" and I said, "When you sit with someone, you're not doing a service with them. What you're doing is you're singing to them like you're singing to your child." When he would go to visit, he came back and he said to me, "What a difference in my sound, in my song and in what I sang to them, and in how I sang it."

A person who is ill in many ways reverts back to the neediness and dependency of being a child. I speak to you from my own experience — a person who is ill struggles with the issue of dependency. Dependency, if you're ill, is very frightening. When you know you're not going to grow out of it, you have to hope you'll be healed out of it. So the sound of one who is nurturing and supportive and loving and caring is very reassuring. It is very healing of doubts and fears that can't be put in words, but they can be put in song, or just in a hum. That may be something you know, or it may even be something they know, that they'll let you know about.

I call the preparation to do this *hachanah*. There is a simple thing that I teach the students in our Rabbinic, Cantorial and Chaplaincy school at the AJR to do. I tell them to take five minutes before walking into a room. It's not: "Let's all go in and sit down and pray now. Open your books, everyone stand, we'll do *Bar'khu*." You all know how you feel when that happens. You can't do that in chaplaincy work either, especially here. If you're having feelings about even going into the hospital, you need to take time for your own centering. If you don't, you're not going to do a good job. You're going to be with people who need for you to be present, as Deborah and Eva have said.

So how do you be present? The way you be present is not to push your fears away, but to confront them and to embrace them, because your fears are like nagging children who won't go away until you pay them attention. When you do that you'll be able to still them, then you can be fully present.

It's nice to say — be fully present, but how do I do that? We have a simple way to do it. In tomorrow's session on meditation, we're going to teach this more definitively, but there's a simple breathing system. Close your eyes, get comfortable, put your stuff down. Don't cross your legs — you can't meditate with things crossed, just put your hands on your knees. I'm just going to describe this before you do it: you're going to inhale through your nose, into your belly, you all know how to do that as singers, slowly; you're going to exhale slowly, not push it out, let it come out in the same length as the inhalation; and then you're going to pause, like you're breathing a triangle. Think of the triangular shapes

of the *Magen David*, but think of the one that's inverted. Think that the Holy One is breathing into you, so instead of taking a breath, you're receiving it. Inhaling is *ru'ach*; God breathes into you; exhalation is *nefesh*, you are giving your life force back to the Holy One, Who breathes you back in; pause, *n'shamah*, you just rest, *ru'ach*, in; *nefesh*, out; pause, *n'shamah*. Just let yourself be — only in your breath. And now for a moment confront the fear you have of being in the presence of one who is ill and needy, who needs something from you. Confront your fear of knowing that you have to give something to them to be present. Fear is anxiety, confusion and questions about competence. When you inhale, feel the fear grow. When you exhale, let it out. When you pause, let God have it. Do that for a moment on your own.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Just stay with the pain and the fear and the anxiety. What does it feel like? How overwhelming is it? "I lift my voice when all is dark, into God's hand, I place my heart; *b'yado afkid ruchi*; I'm not afraid; *Adonai li*; I lift my eyes when all is dark; when I need help, I see God's light; *lo echsar Adonai ro'i*; I'm not afraid; *Adonai li*; la, lai lai lai. *B'yado afkid ruchi*; I'm not afraid, *Adonai li*."

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

Alright, let yourselves come back. You may not want to. Until you do what you need to do for yourself, you will not be in a place to do for them. It's been my experience that this *hachanah* becomes fundamental to what you bring into them, because now facing it, what you bring into them is your vulnerability. They are vulnerable. I have been in that vulnerability and have had to face people who came in to see me who had no sensitivity about it at all. I'm not talking about medical professionals or friends, but other rabbis and cantors and psychologists. The gift of vulnerability is such a magnificent gift to someone who is so vulnerable that they have no place to go, because vulnerability that comes from *weakness* creates that sense of helplessness. In contrast, vulnerability that comes from *strength* is a vulnerability that lifts the other and lets them know that in their vulnerability there can be strength. In preparing, it's important for *kavvanah*, that is, knowing what the purpose is you're there for.

The image of the *ben gilo* appears most beautifully in a work by Brechya, who was a kabbalistic doctor in northern Italy in the 1700s. He wrote a book called *M'vor Yabbok*, which is about visiting the sick. The text itself is beautiful. It's never been translated into English although I'm working on it now with a colleague from the AJR. Part of it talks about this image of *ben gilo*. The *ben gilo* is one who knows how to be in empathetic connection, or *d'veikut*, with the

person you visit.

You are that way first by vulnerability, second by listening. Frequently you go in to a sick person who will rattle on about their illness, but talking about all the details of illness doesn't tell you what's really going on with them. Sometimes it's useful if you can say: "I hear you about your illness, but what's going on with you? Talk to me about how you're feeling. How's your family, how are they handling this? What do *you* want?" Sometimes, people won't say anything at all. They don't know what to say to you. Particularly if you're the cantor or the rabbi they don't know what it is they should say, because they think that what you need to hear is something different.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

There's a beautiful question that I read about in a book which I think all of you should know about, "The American Book of Dying." It's amazing. It's not a Jewish book, but it's very helpful if you deal with hospice for the dying. There's a lot to be learned. In there I read about a woman in London who, when she goes in to see people asks: "How are you within?"

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

The image is that you make it possible to be a *spigelaria*, as it's called in kabbalistic language — a reflective mirror of the person to themselves, so that they can see through your eyes that which they are offering of themselves to others. They get to see more than just a sick person laying in a bed, whether that person is sick and doesn't know what is going to happen, or is sick and will get well and go home, or someone who is sick and is dying. Knowing about the reality of your beingness rather than your illness is important because they want to know what it is you see and what it is that you have to offer to them in the *kaavvanah* of the intimacy, because there is no more intimate moment. I've been told for so many years, that my sitting quietly with someone who's ill or sometimes just looking in their eyes is much more important than the touch.

While we think intimacy comes with your touch, it really doesn't; it comes with your gaze. When a mother's nursing, the minute the baby attaches to the nipple, the mother's pupils dilate. A nanosecond later, the baby's pupils dilate. That's the beginning of the connection, because the way the neurobiologists describe it is that the baby is looking into the mother's soul. That's in the neurobiological textbooks that I studied in getting my degree. That same thing happens through everyone's life. If, when you look in someone's eyes, it's pleasurable, your eyes dilate, and theirs automatically dilate in return.

When you make the connection, this opening happens, and in that

opening, you can come to understand the *bengilo*, the one who is there to be with you. I'm not there for any other agenda, as both Deborah and Eva said, except what concerns you, and what concerns you, concerns me. It's not how I perform, it's not the role I have. It is what gifts can I bring, what can I do to share the burden that you are carrying at this moment? The most important of these is that you are not afraid to be with them in their pain. When most people walk in, their utmost desire is to ease that pain. Everyone from their doctor to their family hope that it gets better and that everything's going to be fine.

But most people don't come to *share* pain, and in my experience, when I was sick and in enormous pain, or told I was going to die, or had just come from a near-death experience, I was in a great deal of pain. It was those who came to be *in* my pain with me who eased me the most and led me back toward health, because pain is isolating. It's also *sui generis*, it exists only for the ailing person in the way they feel it. People will say to you: "You can't imagine the pain I've been in." "Well, that's true, I've never been in your pain, I've been in my pain, but you know what? I will share your pain with you. I won't describe how great mine was, but I'll be in your pain with you and listen to it and hold it."

Holding is the greatest act of being present. It's not just being present, it's containing it, so that when they're frightened or they're in their struggles, there's nothing greater than your being there. Sometimes I've asked people who were ill, "Would you like me to hold you for a moment?" It's amazing the number of them who will say "Yes, please." I'll lean over the bed, not press hard, but just put my arms around them and my head next to them, and just hold them gently. Then the crying comes, or even a single cry, sometimes just a great sigh, and a release. When you move over the boundary of the edge of the bed, you're entering their sphere of their world which is the boundary of the bed. No one else does that. If they don't want a hug, then say, "Well, OK, if you need one, let me know." So that moment of holding the pain becomes the way in which you are prepared to offer to them what they have to let go of.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

In the handout packets there's music, information and also two pages with prayers. One of them is to be said for someone who's taking medicine in treatment, which I'll let Steve introduce. There's an unknown prayer for healing, and the last is one that I wrote. Even though music is our vehicle, we have things to say; if we give ourselves permission, we can actually write something. I wrote a prayer that's generic, which I'd like to read to you. It's something that you can give to a person in the hospital and let them read it themselves. "O Holy One, this is a most difficult time for me. I have lost the familiar, the strength and the

wholeness that once was at my inner core. Help me to understand why this is an important process that I must endure. Help me to see the good that can come from hardship, pain and unexpected difficulty. Even with the love, the friends and the family, I have moments of loneliness and despair. Please accompany me on this journey so I do not feel alone, and help me be open to the light that Your Presence brings. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who supports all in need of physical, emotional, and spiritual strength.”

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

If you'll look at the Hebrew prayer, it's from the *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayyim*. “*Yhi ratson milfanekha, Adonai elohai*” — not *eloheinu*. The *elohai* is important here, because it's *my* God. Point that out to the person. “*sheyhei eisek zeh li lirfu'ah ki rofeh chinam atah*.” “May it be Your will, Adonai my God, that this medicine or treatment should bring me healing, for You send healing as a free gift.” This is an important concept. Everyone struggles with the issue: “Am I being punished? Did I do something wrong?” Well, actually they may have. Someone who's been smoking for 20 years and has lung cancer has done something wrong. Someone who's got heart disease and has been consistently overweight for a long time has done something wrong.

Part of what goes on in Jewish healing is that people know inside themselves that they have some role in their own illness or they haven't. Sometimes they need to talk about it. You may be the only one available. Regardless of that, the issue is that healing comes, and when it does, it's freely given. You don't earn it, you don't have to justify it, it's not because you did something wrong. Healing comes for free, and then after the treatment you say, “*Barukh rofeh cholim*, Blessed is the Healer of the sick.”

This is a very simple *t'fillah*, I've given it to people, I've done it with them a number of times. And then I give it to them to have when they get treatment, letting them know they don't even have to do it in Hebrew. Their response is wonderful. It gives them the sense that there is something they can do when they're dealing with the things that frighten them. They're going off to another MRI, another chemo, they're going off to something else, but they know that there is something simple, in English, that they can take with them and they can remember you taught it to them.

There are other *t'fillot*, and Eva's given you sections of *T'hillim* (the Psalms). But the most important prayer is *r'fa'einu*. *R'fa'einu* doesn't have to be left just to the *Amidah*. Those people you visit who *daven* regularly will know the prayer. But there are those who don't know any prayers and for them it's not important that this comes from the *Amidah* or not, but that is a wonderful

statement that you can sing. Eva wrote this melody, which is in the *R'fu'ah Sh'leimah* book.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

I use the song that I sang while you were in the meditation for people in the hospital. I sing that, and also the Angels' Blessing. Many people just want *Birkat Kohanim*. I do *Yvarekh'kha*, and they're thrilled. It doesn't always have to be a *Mi Shebeirakh*. I thought we could end with singing this together.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

By the way, when you do *Birkat Kohanim* with them, put your hands on their heads. Don't be afraid — particularly for that *t'fillah*. They expect a blessing. Jews don't expect you to pray for them, but Jews love and expect blessings. So, if nothing else, say, "Would you like a blessing?" They may say no, which is fine, but if they say yes, then you put your hands on them, and for that an enormous sense of relief comes.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

*R'fa'einu, r'fa'einu, Adonai, v'neirafei, hoshi'einu v'nivashei'ah, ki t'hilateinu atah. V'ha'alei r'fu'ah, r'fu'ah sh'leimah l'khol makoteinu. V'ha'alei r'fu'ah r'fu'ah sh'leimah l'khol makoteinu. Lai, lai, lai, lai ...*

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## D'var Torah

Hazzan Richard Wolberg

This summer will mark the eighth *yahrtzeit* of the third Bobover Rebbe ה"צ. Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam (the second Bobover Rebbe) was his grandfather, also with the same name. Those who had the privilege of having been in the Rebbe's company will not soon forget the beauty of the Rebbe's every movement. Without having known the Rebbe, it might be difficult to believe what one reads about past Torah giants — that they never moved their bodies in any way, without thinking of their Creator. The Rebbe was recognized not only for his great sanctity and tremendous love for *mitzvos* and Torah, but also for his unequaled and unparalleled *mentschlichkeit*. He was a person who was loved by whomever came into contact with him, Jew and non-Jew alike.

At the Rebbe's *shiva*, a woman who appeared to be out of place came to visit. From her appearance, it was obvious she was not an observant Jewess. The Rebbe's daughters wondered what her relationship with their father could possibly have been. "I lived in the West Side of Manhattan," she began, "when your father came to there in the early 1950s. To tell you the truth," she said, "I'm no great *maven* on Rebbes, so I can't tell you how holy your father was, though no doubt he was a holy man. But do you know why I came to the *shiva*? Because in my whole life, I've never met more of a *mentsch* than your father. Even though he knew I wasn't religious, he always treated me with tremendous respect, and never made me feel like less of a Jew. I used to look forward to seeing your father just walking in the street; he had such a special way about him. I'm not a *maven* on a Rebbe, but I'm a *maven* on a *mentsch*."

Next true story: In the 90s a Bobover *chassid* from Brooklyn hired a poor black man to paint his house. Noticing a huge picture of the Rebbe on the *chassid's* table, he remarked, "You know — that's my Rabbi." The *chassid* was intrigued; it wasn't every day that a man like this had a Rabbi — let alone a *chassidic* Rebbe. The *chassid* asked the painter what he meant that the Bobover Rebbe was his rabbi. "Do you want to know why? I'll tell you why. That wonderful man, Rabbi Halberstam, once hired me to paint his dining room. When I arrived in the morning, he greeted me with a warm 'Good morning!' Then he asked me if I had eaten breakfast. Actually, I hadn't, and I told him that I didn't have time. 'You can't work all morning without eating something; let me fetch you something to eat.' Can you believe it? The Rabbi made me breakfast?!"

"So after I had eaten, I began plastering the walls. At one point, the Rabbi came over to where I was painting. 'Your work is excellent,' he said, 'almost too perfect. Please, don't work so hard to make it perfect. There's nothing wrong

with a few small rough spots here and there. In fact, thousands of years ago, we had a Holy Temple. There, everything had to be totally perfect since it was God's house on earth. But for my house here, 'pretty good' is good enough. Thank you so much for your hard work.' Ever since that time, I considered Rabbi Halberstam MY rabbi."

*Chazal* say, "*Derekh eretz kadma la-Torah.*" Roughly translated — "being a *mentsch* comes before keeping the Torah." In other words, if our Torah study and observance are not accompanied by, and proceeded by proper attention to our character and the way we deal with others, then it calls our study and our motives into serious question.

Rabbi Chaim Vital asks: If *derekh eretz* is so important, why doesn't the Torah address it by making it one of the *taryag mitzvos* — a specific *mitzvah* to have good manners and character improvement? He answers: Were *derekh eretz* to be a *mitzvah*, it would imply that it's a *mitzvah* just like all the other *mitzvos*. In truth, it's much more. It's actually a precondition to observing the Torah — a person lacking in basic *mentschlichkeit* can't even begin to study and connect with the Torah!

Now I will tie together two incidences in the Torah which will pull everything together. We all know about the *egel hazahav* and the rebellion of Korach and his group. The sin of the Golden Calf was grave — considered by many, the gravest. There is no sin worse than *Avodah Zara*, the sin of idol worship. However, Korach and his people's rebellion went beyond sin. Their lack of respect and appreciation for Moshe, the greatest prophet, the brazen way they spoke and their refusal to speak with him even when he belittled himself by pursuing them in hope of defusing the conflict, demonstrated that they lacked the most basic Jewish character traits of humility, respectfulness, and sensitivity. They could never be respectable leaders of others because they lacked the main ingredient differentiating man from beast — *mentschlichkeit*.

Perhaps this is why the Torah switches the order, placing the Korach rebellion before the sin of the Calf, in deference to the dictum that good character, which Korach and his fellows were lacking, must be attended to before one can aspire to delve into the deeper and more intellectually challenging areas of Torah study.

The first *Beis Ha-mikdash*, say *Chazal*, was destroyed principally as the result of idol worship. The second *Beis Ha-mikdash* was destroyed as a result of one Jew hating and mistreating another. The first *Beis Ha-mikdash* was rebuilt after 70 years of exile, during which the Jews ceased to serve idolatry and repented from their ways. The second one still lays in ruin after two millennia of waiting and anticipation. Perhaps the lesson here is that *derekh eretz kadma la-Torah* —

holiness cannot be built until we learn to treat one another with respect, courtesy and *mentschlichkeit*.

*We record with special sorrow, the names of  
the following colleagues who have passed away this year:*

## MEMORIAL ROLL OF

Shabtai Ackerman  
Isadore Adelsman  
Martin Adolf  
Bernard Alt  
Harry Altman  
Joseph Amdur  
Irving Ashery  
Morris Avirom  
  
Asher Balaban  
Gedaliah Bargad  
Jacob Barkin  
Saul Bash  
Ben W. Belfer  
Leon Bennett  
Simon Bermanis  
Akibah Bernstein  
Eliezer Bernstein  
Frank Birnbaum  
Sigmund Blass  
Charles Bloch  
Mario Botoshansky  
Saul H. Breeh  
Harold Brindell  
Harry Brockman  
David Brodsky  
  
William H. Caesar  
Barry Caplan  
Paul Carus  
David Chasman  
Jordan Cohen  
Tevele Cohen  
Renée Coleson  
Jay Corn  
Josef Cycowski  
Joseph Cysner  
  
Henry Danzinger  
Simon Domowitz  
Morris Dubinsky  
Stephen Dobov  
Samuel Dubrow  
  
Leopold Edelstein  
Aaron Edgar

Gershon Ephros  
Abraham J. Ezring  
Ruben Erlbaum  
  
Max Feder  
Nico Feldman  
Irving Feller  
Nicholas Fenakel  
Donald Fischer  
Merrill Fisher  
Mark Fishof  
Felix Fogelman  
Joseph Frankel  
Charles Freedland  
Milton Freedman  
Harry Freilich  
Uri Frenkel  
Henry Fried  
Abraham Friedmann  
Israel Fuchs  
  
Moshe Ganchoff  
Frederick Gartner  
Norman Geller  
Marcus Gerlich  
William Belskin-Ginsburg  
Solomon Gisser  
Leib Glantz  
Myro Glass  
Gerhard Gluck  
Joshua Gluckstein-Reiss  
William Z. Glueck  
Bernard Glusman  
Leon Gold  
Maurice Goldberg  
Eugene Goldberger  
Judah Goldring  
Jacob Goldstein  
Mordecai M. Goldstein  
Jacob Gowseelow  
Isaiah M. Grama  
Henry Greenberg  
Todros Greenberg  
Morris Greenfield

Charles Gudovitz  
Isaiah Guterman  
  
Nathaniel Halevy  
Herman Hammerman  
Michal Hammerman  
Herbert Harris  
Henry Hearst  
Yehuda Heilbraun  
Mordecai Heiser  
Louis Herman  
Gabriel Hochberg  
William Hofstader  
Jacob Hohenemser  
Eugene Holzer  
William S. Horn  
Aaron Horowitz  
Israel Horowitz  
  
Israel Idelsohn  
  
David Jacob  
Victor Jacoby  
  
Eli Kagan  
Julie Kamenir  
Stuart Kanas  
Simon Kandler  
Abraham Kantor  
Abraham Kaplan  
Adolph Katchko  
David Katzenstein  
Paul Kavon  
Sidney Keiser  
Samuel Kelemer  
Herman Kinniry  
Saul Kirschenbaum  
Irving Kischel  
Louis Klein  
Jacob Kleinberg  
Ben Klonsky  
Arthur S. Koret  
Jacob Kurland  
David Kusevitsky

הazzan: Hazzan Josh Perlman (Rockville, MD)

Shabtai Ackerman, Asher Balaban, Henry Danzinger, Joseph Frankel,  
Mordecai M. Goldstein, Isaiah M. Grama, Samuel Kelemer, Harry London,  
Abraham Mehler, Irving Pinsky, Morton Pliskin, David Tauber

## DEPARTED COLLEAGUES

Joseph Lengyel	Morton Pliskin	Jeffrey Shapiro
David Leon	Sherwood Plitnick	Moshe Shavit
Morris Levinson	Samuel Postolow	Gregor Shelkan
Abraham Levitt	Dov Propis	Ruben Sherer
Charles Lew	David J. Puttermann	Max Shimansky
Joshua Lind	Abraham Rabinowitz	Benjamin Siegel
Murray Lind	Abraham Rannani	Norton Siegel
Samuel Linkovsky	Israel Reich	David I. Silverman
Sigmund Lipp	Abraham Reisman	Moses J. Silverman
Harry London	Yaakov Y. Renzer	Harry Silversmith
Morris Lowy	Tevele Ring	Jacob Sivan
Harry Lubow	Moses Rontal	Hyman Sky
Yehudah Leyb Mandel	Abraham S. Rose	Jacob Sonenklar
Asher Mandelblatt	Louis Rosen	Nathaniel Sprinzen
Aaron Mann	Yechiel Rosen	Mendel Stawis
David Mann	Samuel Rosenbaum	Joshua O. Steele
Joseph Mann	Ephraim Rosenberg	Charles Sudock
Fred Mannes	Moshe Rosenfeld	Israel Tabatsky
Philip Marantz	Charles Ross	David Tauber
Gerson S. Margolis	Louis Rothman	Isaac Trager
Morris Markowitz	Chaim P. Rothstein	Julius Ulman
Abraham Marton	Sidney Rube	Carl Urstein
Leon H. Masovetsky	William Rubin	Paula Victor
Bernard Matlin	Arthur A. Sachs	Shmuel Vigoda
Saul Meisels	Abraham Salkov	George Wagner
Nathan Mendelson	Sol Sanders	Henry Wahrman
Abraham Mehler	William Sauler	Jacob Wahrman
Allen Michelson	Marvin Savitt	Sol Wechsler
Edgar Mills	Sidney Scharff	Harry Weinberg
Philip Moddel	Itzik Schiff	Joseph Wieselman
Samuel Morginstin	Morris Schorr	Abba Yosef Weisgal
Abraham Naimark	Alvin F. Schraeter	Solomon Winter
Moshe Nathanson	Arnold Schraeter	Max Wohlberg
Maurice Neu	Joseph A. Schroeder	Arthur Yolkoff
Paul Niederland	Jacob Schwartz	Herbert Zaiman
Ben G. Nosowsky	Joseph Schwartzman	Israel Zuckerberg
Morris Okun	Robert Segal	
Elija Olkon	Samuel Seidelman	
Norman Perman	Moshe Semigran	
Morris Pernick	Morton Shanok	
Irving Pinsky	Abraham Shapiro	
	Abraham B. Shapiro	

אֶל מֶלֶךְ: Hazzan Shira Belfer (New York, NY)



## Memorial to Twelve Departed Colleagues

Hazzan Josh Perlman

### SHABTAI ACKERMAN

Born in Romania, and a survivor of the Holocaust, Hazzan Ackerman's career started at the age of 16 where he officiated as guest cantor in several synagogues including the Great Synagogue of Kishinev. As a refugee, he chanted services in the great Moscow Synagogue. He held positions in Romania, Israel, and the United States. He was a great supporter of Israel Bonds and is a past president of the Cantor's Association of Israel and the Cantors Council of Detroit. In our own organization, he received two *Kavod* awards, the highest award given to our peers by our peers. Hazzan Ackerman was a Hazzan's Hazzan. When I was a small boy going to the conventions at Grossinger's (ל"י), I remember Shabtai would always have a reserved table for his friends. Throughout the convention one would never see the same people at his table. He would always invite a new face to join his friends and then make them feel special. I remember when it was my turn to be invited to sit at his table with his beloved Dora, how he spoke about the loving friendship he had with my parents. I also remember that he always had a check for the Cantors Assembly of at least \$10,000. He would deliver it with pride and tell all who were in attendance: "If you don't ask you won't get." We will miss his dramatic tenor voice and his skillful understanding and love of *hazzanut*. *Zikhrono Livrakhah*.

### ASHER BALABAN

Hazzan Balaban, who was born in Yugoslavia to a rabbinic family, came to the United States in 1925. He started chanting as a High Holy Day cantor when he was just 18. He studied with Cantor Yehoshua Weisser and was entering Yeshiva University. He came to serve several congregations as hazzan in New York and Pennsylvania and was loved by his congregants and students. He was passionate about *hazzanut* and had this to say: "*Hazzanut* is more than hitting the high notes and knowing a repertoire of melodies, as beautiful as that may be. It is the inflection, the timing, the dramatic pauses, the dynamics, the emphasis on a certain syllable or phrase that, in combination one with another, match musically with the meaning of the liturgical text, thus conveying mood and feeling, inspiring awe and heightening spirituality." Just a few short years ago Asher attended a convention in the Catskills. I will never forget it. He came in a wheelchair and sat in the hallway talking to all who walked by. One night at that convention Simon Spiro made the whole night about Asher and kept referring

to him. He and his wife, Rosalind, were having a wonderful time thanks to the love that Simon showed them. Asher then got up on stage and started chanting *hazzanut* from his heart. You could have heard a pin drop if one had dared. We listened to every note in awe of this giant. What a gift Simon presented to Hazzan Balaban, giving him that most incredible moment to shine. What a wonderful present it was for us to have shared it with him. His congregations and students remember him with love, as do we. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

#### HENRY DANZINGER

Born November 14, 1925, Cantor Danzinger studied in Breslau and Frankfurt and was brought to England before the Holocaust by the Save the Children program. He studied *hazzanut* under Mayerovich and music at the London College of Music. He studied opera under Italian opera teacher and famed tenor, Beniamino Gigli. He sang in the Glybourne Opera Company in Sussex, and his favorite role was Papagano in the *Magic Flute*. He held three positions in London and was brought from England to Ezra Habonim in Chicago where he served from 1976 until 1981. He and his pianist wife, Rhoda, gave many concerts together. He was both cantor and music teacher at Ezra Habonim. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

#### JOSEPH FRANKEL

Born June 12, 1916 in Hamburg. By the time Joe Frankel was old enough to go to a university, it was impossible to attend because of Nazi persecution, so he went to school to become a machinist. In the meantime, he pursued his great love of music. From the time of his Bar Mitzvah, he had been a member of his synagogue's choir. Thus began his passion for leading the *davening* as a *sh'lach tsibbur*. On November 9, 1938, Kristallnacht, the Nazis went to the student housing where Joe was living, now in Frankfurt, and they rounded up all the Jewish young men. Joe was taken to Buchenwald, where he remained a prisoner for four months. He had blue eyes and blond hair and one of the Nazi officers asked Joe if he was Jewish. He said he was. Perhaps if he had lied, they would not have taken him. But that was not in Joe's nature. He was a survivor and eventually studied music at Seattle University. He studied *hazzanut* under Hazzanim Rothschild, Stern and Goldfarb. From 1949 until his retirement in 1980, Cantor Frankel served Herzl Congregation in Seattle. He touched the lives of people in his community in an extraordinary way. One could sense his impact in the way that people spoke his name — there's a reverence, affection and admiration. One can truly feel how much he meant to people. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

### MORDECAI M. GOLDSTEIN

Cantor Mordecai Goldstein was born and educated in Colorado where, as a child and young adult, he studied music, taught Hebrew School and sang in a synagogue choir for many years. After graduating from the University of Denver with a degree in music composition, he attended the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He graduated in 1965 with a Master of Arts in Sacred Music and a Diploma in *Hazzanut*. He served two congregations in southern New Jersey prior to his 25 active years at Neve Shalom, also in New Jersey. Cantor Goldstein was a member of the New Jersey Cantors' Concert Ensemble, which performs throughout the state. He was responsible for instituting Neve Shalom's renowned and widely imitated Torah Readers Program. Cantor Goldstein retired at the end of June 1999 in order to join his wife, Barbara, in Israel, where she has been serving as an executive of Hadassah. He is described as a kind and quiet hazzan who people just liked to be around. *Zikhrone Livrakhah.*

### ISAIAH M. GRAMA

Cantor Grama, also an ordained rabbi, served Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Bridgeport, Connecticut for the past 31 years. He was a 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason and Chaplain of The Pyramid Temple of Milford Shriners. Those in the Cantors Assembly who knew him personally described him as a devoted member of the CA. He served as chair of his region for many years. He also concertized with his colleagues throughout the state as a member of his region. He was an inspiration to young people in his congregation and instilled a great love of Judaism and *hazzanut* in them as well. He will be remembered by his colleagues for his tremendous voice and huge heart. His congregants speak of him as a man who set a standard; not just as a voice, but as a person who they will all remember. He was sometimes referred to as the "Candy Man" because of the sweets he shared after Shabbat services. His voice pierced his congregational family's souls and rang out to put all those present in awe. He will be missed so much, but his voice, his presence his laughing eyes and, as one congregant stated, his tuning fork will not be forgotten. *Zikhrone Livrakhah.*

### SAM "SHMULIK" KELEMER

Born in the Ukraine, the youngest of five children, Cantor Kelemer entered the world singing — a descendant of nine generations of rabbis. He studied in *cheder* at four years old, learned *t'hillim* by heart and was considered a *wunder kind* — a wonder child with his singing, so he was given the title of "Hazzan" by his Rebbe. In New York, by the time he was nine years old, he sang in theaters. He

was engaged at Carnegie Hall in a show with George Jessel, Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson and other headliners. Inspired by Jolson, he did a one knee act like Jolson and sang “A Letter to Mama” followed, for contrast, by *Adam Ysodo*. As a youngster, he appeared in a number of the first “talkie” films. He received praises from Rosenblatt, Kwartin, Glantz and Pinchik. Shmulik was the youngest hazzan to be awarded an honorary degree from Hebrew Union College. He trained under Hazzanim Weisser and Katchko and studied at Julliard. In addition, he earned *s'micha*. He served as an officer of the American Conference of Cantors and taught on the faculty of the University of Judaism and at the Brandeis Institute. Cantor Kelemer served congregations in Miami Beach before coming to Beth Am in Los Angeles, where he was *sh'l'ach tsibbur* for 30 years, until his retirement. *Zikhrono Livrakhah*.

#### HARRY LONDON

Hazzan Harry London was Cantor Emeritus at Beth Am Synagogue in Baltimore, MD. When Beth Am was formed more than 30 years ago, Harry became the new synagogue’s first cantor. He brought a deep love of synagogue music to his pulpit, respect of *nusach* and an excellent knowledge of Jewish traditions. Harry served with great devotion. He was important not only to Beth Am, but to many synagogues in Baltimore. He was a longtime member of the Chizuk Amuno choir under Hazzan Abba Weisgal. Even after Harry retired, he continued to offer constructive suggestions to his successors and remained active on Beth Am’s Adult Education Committee. Harry never stopped learning and consistently encouraged others. Harry envisioned a broad, inclusive Jewish community. He served as a mentor to synagogue leaders and helped organize area cantors in forming the Cantors Association of Greater Baltimore. This group brought together Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox cantors, cantorial soloists and anyone else who wanted to learn, share a love of Jewish music and synagogue cantorial skills and become better professionals in our craft. All who knew him knew Harry was a *mentsch*. He cared a great deal about hazzanut and the people he served. *Zikhrono Livrakhah*.

#### ABRAHAM MEHLER

Cantor Abraham Mehler was born in Poland and emigrated to Belgium in 1928 with his family. He went to Yeshiva starting at the age of three. He studied with many great scholars and musicians as well as his father who was also a cantor. When World War II began, he fled to France where he spent many hard days and months. When he was able to leave, his was the last ship to depart Europe, arriving in Havana, Cuba, via Oran, Algiers and Morocco. His family was sent to

Auschwitz and perished there. He continued to study music and voice in Cuba and eventually arrived in New York. For most of his life he was a hard-working man. He was a butcher, but *nusach* ran through his veins. He was a *ba'al nusach* par excellence and served in this capacity for many congregations over his lifetime. He only had nice words to say about everyone, never an unkind word. His warmest greeting was his smile; he just made people happy to be around him. Cantor Mehler became a member of the Cantors Assembly late in life as he was retiring in Florida. He served Temple Beth Tikvah in Greenacres, Florida for over a decade. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

#### IRVING PINSKY

Hazzan Dr. Irving Pinsky was born in New York City on January 22, 1916. He sang as a youngster with Hazzanim Machtenberg and Nadler. He was a graduate of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School, the pioneer Yeshiva in America, and the Talmudical Academy of Yeshiva University. He received his Bachelor of Social Science degree from St. John's University and a teacher's diploma from the Teachers Institute of Yeshiva University. In 1957, Irving received a Master's Degree in Religious Education and in 1961 the degree of Doctor of Education from Yeshiva University. Dr. Pinsky received his rabbinical ordination from Beth Midrash Lerabonim, the Rabbinical Academy of America in 1972. In addition to his role as Hebrew teacher, Dr. Pinsky was asked, in 1949, to serve as temporary cantor at Beth El of Waterbury, Connecticut, a position which would last for the next 46 years. By 1952, Dr. Pinsky had assumed the position of Educational Director for the synagogue as well. While at Beth El, he created their first junior congregation for youngsters from ages 8 to 13. In 1953, he conducted the first Bat Mitzvah in the congregation's history. Under Dr. Pinsky's guidance, the religious school received the prestigious Solomon Schechter Award for high standards in 1955. Many of his students won numerous national religious Bible contests as a result of his rigorous training. He studied *hazzanut* under Leo Low. Cantor Pinsky served Beth El of Waterbury, Connecticut from 1947 until his retirement. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

#### MORTON PLISKIN

Born August 21, 1929, Morton Pliskin represented the third generation of cantors in his family. As a boy, he sang in his father's choir and in the choirs of many of the outstanding cantors of that era. Immediately after becoming a Bar Mitzvah, he became a "boy cantor" and conducted services in pulpits throughout the United States and Canada. Morton studied at the College of Jewish Studies in Chicago, received his Master of Music degree in 1989 from Northeastern

Illinois University, and studied *hazzanut* under his father, Abraham Pliskin, as well as Hazzanim Israel Scheiffer and Irving Platt. He was active in his professional calling by serving as the chairman of the Chicago Region of the Cantors Assembly and also participated in the Cantorial Council of America. Hazzan Pliskin's mastery of *nusach*, *perush ha-milah*, and trope was exemplary. His 65 years on the pulpit gave him the ability to *daven* from the heart, which inspired so many in prayer and song. He combined the old-style *hazzanut*, including *parlando* davening, with modern melodies for congregational participation. He served four congregations from 1949 until his passing this year. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

#### DAVID TAUBER

David Tauber, a winner of both the H. L. Miller Cantorial Fellowship and the Richard Brisken Cantor in Residence Award, thrilled audiences with his warm baritone voice, exciting stage presence and unique phrasing. A resident artist with both the Tri-Cities Opera in Binghamton, New York and the Amato Opera in Manhattan, David performed roles ranging from the Duke of Verona in *Romeo and Juliet* to Papageno in the *Magic Flute*. A soloist with the Jerusalem Oratorio Choir, he was asked to represent Israel at the Millennium Sacrum Festival in Valencia, Spain. He was a soloist at Lincoln Center's Merkin Hall with the Rottenberg Choral. He was heard in recital in Albany, Binghamton, Rochester, Manhattan and Long Island. In September 2005, Cantor Tauber was selected by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to sing *Hatikvah* for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the Palace Hotel in Manhattan. Upon hearing him sing, James Tisch, CEO of Loews Corporation and former Chairman of the Conference of Presidents said, "Cantor Tauber's rendition of *Hatikvah* was as inspirational as when Israel won the gold in Athens." Most recently, in concert with Cantor Alberto Mizrahi at Shelter Rock Jewish Center, Cantor Tauber received a standing ovation and rave reviews. Cantor Tauber served the Sutton Place Synagogue, the East Meadow Jewish Center and directed the Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York. Most recently he served North Shore Synagogue in Syosset, which filled to capacity for his untimely *levayah*. *Zikhrono Livrakhah.*

## Report of the Executive Vice President

Hazzan Stephen J. Stein

Last year marked the 10<sup>th</sup> *yahrtzeit* of Sam Rosenbaum ה"ר, who served as Executive Vice President of the CA for almost four decades. I used that opportunity, during my annual address, to focus on issues with which the Cantorate wrestled during his tenure, particularly as articulated during his convention speeches. This year, as was noted on Sunday evening, marks my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Sam's successor. I am deeply grateful for the honor of being able to serve you in this manner. This is a most appropriate time to look ahead and to share what I see on the horizon for us.

In comparing Sam's years of service to mine, not surprisingly, there have been and will continue to be major challenges that we must overcome in order to persevere. Yet, to triumph over an obstacle is a positive act which makes us stronger and prevents complacency. If there were no challenges, our profession, and life in general, would be dull. Our senior members will remember the lawsuits in which we prevailed over the federal government, led by our legal counsel of long-standing, Herbert Garten, cases over issues such as parsonage, Social Security and Selective Service.

The manner in which we view and discuss synagogue music has clearly undergone significant change over the past 35 years. In the 1970s and 80s, Sam spoke of what he, and most of us at the time, saw as an erosion of synagogue music primarily because of influences such as the Chassidic Song Festivals, summer camps and youth groups. What I believe is different today is that as committed as we are to the preservation of *nusach*, *hazzanut* and the repertoire of the great composers of synagogue music, particularly of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we have come to understand the need to acknowledge and incorporate the musical preferences of our laity. There is, indeed, a difficult balancing act between wanting to maintain high standards for synagogue repertoire while presenting music that speaks to the laity of today. This is not an easy task. We are the guardians of synagogue music. If we don't ensure the preservation of its traditions, no one will. Yet, if the music we present does not speak to our congregants, both those who regularly attend services and those we hope to attract, what have we really accomplished?

Several years ago, I attended a community Shabbat service at a local Reform congregation. I could not help but to be moved by the manner in which the congregation sang Debbie Friedman's *Mi Sheberach*. As I listened and observed the passion with which they sang, it was clear that this melody was a vehicle by which these worshipers fervently prayed for the recovery of loved ones. Was

there *kavvanah* in their prayer? Without question! And so, if we are to remain relevant, we are going to have to present music that touches our laity; music that they can relate to.

When I ask our members about their concerns for the future, most often their first response is placement. There are a growing number of young men and women who wish to enter this most wonderful vocation and, blessed by good health, more of our members are working beyond their mid-sixties. I had the opportunity back in March to address the students of the Miller Cantorial School. I told them as I've said to you, that I believe that the best way to develop more positions is to create varied models of cantors. In particular, I would like to see more cantor/educators and believe that in doing so we can open up a significant number of positions in synagogues which, until now, have not had full-time hazzanim. Based on what I've seen and learned, if I were attending the Miller Cantorial School today, I would surely also give serious thought to earning a Master's degree from the Davidson School of Education before leaving JTS. One may not need that degree today, but it might come in handy at some point down the road.

Being a cantor/educator doesn't necessarily mean that you will be the Hebrew school principal. You might be asked to supervise that person, oversee a family education program or create a course of study in your synagogue for adult education.

I'm not unaware of the difficulty of holding these dual roles in a congregation, but we have to be realistic about the financial challenges being faced by an increasing number of synagogues.

I would like to see a growing number of cantors earning a Master's degree in social work and using those skills to help their congregations. Hazzan/Pastoral Counselor is another model.

I've had preliminary discussions with Arnie Eisen and Brad Artson about a program that would allow a hazzan to earn *s'micha* within a more reasonable amount of time. So, I've outlined several different models — cantor, cantor/educator, cantor/social worker, cantor/pastoral counselor and cantor/rabbi. There may be other examples as well. All of us have different skills and strengths. Few, if any of us, are suited for all these models. Find the one that works best for you, especially if you are under the age of 50, anticipate working at least another 15 years and/or are serving a mid-sized to smaller congregation with declining numbers.

In truth, how much of a stretch is this from the many and varied responsibilities most of us now carry out in our congregations?

I am, in fact, quite optimistic about the future of our profession, but all of

us must realize that to persevere requires adapting to changing realities in North American Jewry. Few if any professions are immune from adjustments in order to remain vibrant and relevant.

What about the future of the Conservative movement? In recent years, much attention has been given to what is wrong with our movement. But, I think we have done enough bashing of Conservative Judaism. There is a limit to how much a parent should chastise a child for something he/she has done wrong. Such words of admonition must be followed by words of praise, helping the child restore self-confidence and a positive outlook. The time has come to emphasize what is right and to be treasured about who we are and what we believe in. I know in my mind and heart we carry the right message. As Conservative Jews, we must carefully consider what is to be retained and what needs to be modified. And, when change is to be made, it must be implemented carefully, following thorough deliberation. We must do a better job of promoting our message. We need to be better at sharing with others our passion and pride in being Conservative Jews.

I have a theory as to one of the major reasons the Conservative movement has struggled. Post-World War II, perhaps through the 1970s, Jews flocked to our synagogues without our having to do anything to entice them. In particular, we attracted those raised in Orthodox congregations (note I didn't say they were necessarily Orthodox in practice), those who were looking for a synagogue that bridged traditionalism and modernity. We never learned to compete. But, for the past few decades, we've had competition. The intermarried have felt more comfortable in Reform congregations and those who sought a more observant environment found a greater sense of community among the Orthodox. And, in every small to mid-sized community I continuously hear how Chabad is luring members away from Conservative synagogues. To right the ship, we are going to have to learn how to compete. We are going to have to roll up our sleeves and work harder. Many of our congregations believe they are welcoming when they really are not. Chabad knows how to make people feel wanted and while their objective is to persuade Jews to observe more *mitzvot*, initially they convince prospective members that they are being accepted for whom they are. I believe that Jews looking to affiliate with a synagogue today are less concerned than ever before about the congregation's affiliation. Rather, the question they ask themselves is, "where will I feel most welcome."

As we look to the future, an area of particular concern to me which I plan to raise with United Synagogue, is the erosion of respect among laity for *k'lei kodesh*. I see this almost every day in the phone calls I receive from colleagues. In fact, there are comparatively few conflicts reported to me between cantors and rabbis.

Most disputes are between cantors and lay leaders. More and more I find myself advising colleagues to engage an attorney. Congregants have to be re-taught that the work we do is sacred. When rabbis and cantors are treated like typical employees, easily terminated when a new group of lay leaders decides a change is warranted, we are all in trouble. The roles we fill and the people who fill them must be treated with reverence. Similarly, it is essential that cantors and rabbis always remember that they are role models, and must conduct themselves accordingly. Respect is earned.

Finally, as we look to the future we are finding that the Jewish community as a whole, rabbis, lay leaders and others are more open to the input of hazzanim than ever before. They are very interested in what we think and have to say. Issues such as intermarriage, low Jewish birthrate, apathy and Jewish illiteracy extend well beyond the Conservative movement.

As some of you know, a close friend of mine who resides in Akron is Joe Kanfer, the current chair of United Jewish Communities, perhaps making him the highest ranking lay leader in North American Jewry. You may know his company, GoJo Industries, which makes a product we all use, Purell. Joe has told me in candid conversations that even UJC is struggling to figure out how to engage the younger generation. The movers and shakers of North American Jewry are looking to all Jewish communal leaders, which we are, for fresh ideas about engaging young Jews and making the synagogue service dynamic. They are willing to listen to us as never before. The Cantors Assembly is now welcomed into arenas that ten years ago wouldn't give us the time of day. What a wonderful and unique opportunity we now have as hazzanim to help shape the future of Jewish communal life.

This organization includes talented, creative, highly intelligent, hard-working cantors. Just as the founders of the Cantors Assembly overcame tremendous obstacles, some of which were enumerated at the beginning of my address, so, too, will we persevere in meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow as we move forward. May *Y'hoshua bin Nun* and *Calev ben Yfuneh*, whose confidence and optimism inspire us in this week's *sidrah*, be our role models now and into the future.

The Cantors Assembly continues to be, as it has always been, a truly outstanding organization. That is a tribute to each and every one of you, for whatever we have accomplished has been the result of all of us working together. For that, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

## Envisioning a New Future for the Cantorate:

*Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson*

I want to thank you for the chance to speak with you. I know that you've been using your time here, in addition to enjoying your collegiality, to address the really serious issue about the future of the cantorate, which, I am persuaded, is inextricably bound up in the future of traditional Judaism in North America. Let me say what I mean by that.

In 1958, my father moved from New York to California to start a business in what he saw as a booming industry, which was telephone answering services. That's where, when your phone rings, there would be an operator who could plug in at a board, and she would answer the phone for you if you didn't answer it after a certain amount of rings. That industry, in the space of his lifetime, evaporated. It's gone. It's not that answering phones has stopped being important, that mode of answering phones doesn't exist anymore.

I'd like us to think about whether we are living in such a time in the Jewish world in which not Jewish music — Jewish music is thriving — but the kinds of Jewish music you represent to people, and that I love listening to, is having an increasingly challenging time finding its place in the hearts and in the voices of contemporary Jews. I want to be very clear about what I'm *not* saying here. I am not being critical of cantorial music. I love cantorial music. I am not being critical of cantors. I even love cantors. But we live in an age in which religion has become increasingly about personal self-gratification. Religion is whatever moves me. Religion is about self-pleasure. If you don't find it meaningful at the moment, then the problem is not with your inner-work, the problem is you're not being instantly gratified or accommodated.

In that environment, I think it is no coincidence that two things come together. We face an unparalleled challenge to Conservative Judaism as a whole, and the cantorate is being assaulted on a daily basis. It looks to me like our brothers and sisters in Orthodoxy have already pretty much abandoned hazzanut. More and more, the Orthodox congregations I hear about don't have a hazzan at all. Instead, a yeshiva *bocher* goes up to the *amud* and does his *davening*. I accompanied a friend to a local Orthodox congregation at five in the morning on *Shavu'ot*. Some little *pisher* got up and hacked apart the service, and that's considered authentic. Sorry, that was a value judgment.

Within the Reform movement similarly, hazzanut is being abandoned one step at a time. Even within our own movement, the area of dynamism and growth is young Jews coming together in voluntarily-led, no longer *chavurot*, but these non-denominational minyanim, in which there is incredible vitality,

incredible energy, often a lot of drum banging and no hazzan. What's invisible to my rabbinic colleagues is that, in a sense, the rabbinate has also disappeared. It's just that the rabbis don't know that the old model is gone. If you think about the towering rabbinic figures of the '60s and '70s, these were scholarly men who wrote learned articles for scholarly journals. When they spoke, they spoke six feet above criticism and well over the heads of their congregations. That's how you knew they were learned. In a sense, the rabbinate has already remade itself without knowing that's what it's doing. Rabbi-scholars don't exist in that way anymore. The old rabbinic sermon that linked together the great classics of Western literature with obscure *Midrashim* found in *Geniza* documents — those sermons don't exist anymore either.

If there is to be a future for the cantorate — and I hope that there is, I believe that there is — it will be linked to the future of a Judaism that manages to pull people out of their own egocentricity and into an invitation to a life of service, a life of piety, a life of deep and profound connection. But that's a big challenge in this culture, because everything in this culture mitigates against those orientations, those lodestars, those values. It does take some of what we heard earlier from your Executive Vice President, which was well said and very important. I do think we need to look at retooling cantorial training to include other areas of expertise. I think that will not only benefit the congregations which are our employers, it will also benefit the cantors, themselves, who will be appreciated not simply as human tape recorders, but as actual clergy. I think it's important that cantors master the full array of Jewish music, not simply from one period or another.

Flying out here, on my iPod — another indication, by the way, that music is alive and well in the contemporary world — I have a new CD of music from Tudor, England, from the court of King Henry. Did you know that during that period Jews were not allowed in England? Yet there were a group of *Conversos* who had come from Spanish-speaking countries, who were known to continue to practice Judaism in private, who were hired by the court to write religious music, into which they often smuggled subtle Jewish themes. Now, what was fascinating to me about this music is it sounds like Tudor music of anyone's composition. And yet it was known, although never admitted, that this was, in a sense, Jewish liturgical music played in a church service. That music sounds nothing like what you or I mean when we say "hazzanut."

My point here is that hazzanut is richer than any one tradition, than any one stream. Rather than responding defensively by defining hazzanut with one particular period or one particular place, we need to reassert the full dynamic creativity of Jewish artistic and musical expression. That ought to be your area

of expertise, in which you invite people to join.

We live in an age in which performances are interactive. Interestingly enough, I travel to a lot of synagogues and often go to services which the rabbis describe as “interactive.” Let me tell you what is meant when a rabbi calls a service “interactive.” It means the rabbi holds a tambourine. Sometimes it means that the congregants hold these little plastic eggs that have these little things in them that go “ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch,” often with the logo of the congregation cleverly printed on the side. I am struck by the fact that an alien visitor such as myself might not consider that truly interactive. I wonder what it would look like if the cantorate took the lead here. It may be — and I hope you don’t quote me on this — that the rabbinic ego will make it difficult for my rabbinic colleagues to truly, truly allow there to be an interactive, participatory service. But singing, by its nature, is relational, is participatory, is cooperative.

I don’t know about you, but for me, the single most moving moment this morning was when you started to hum during Shira Belfer’s beautiful rendition. What greater way to lift up a colleague and to stand with her? What greater way to honor the colleagues whose lives were so inspiring than to contribute your voice to theirs?

When we sing in such a way that a congregant’s reaction is to either shut up or turn off, we are not actually producing music. Music is an invitation to respond. Music is soul-to-soul joining together. It’s the greatest cooperative thing you can do out of a bed.

What if, from the cantors, there emerged a kind of leadership that saw success not in being applauded and not in being heard, but in being sung with? What if we were able to create music in such a way that people could not sit still in their seats during a service? That, at some point in the service, they had to stand, they had to move, they had to clap with their bones to praise God? That could change the world and change the standing of your work.

I flew out from California for two things. I wanted to encourage you not to get defensive, to use this opportunity as a chance to re-engage where you are strong and where the tradition puts powerful resources into your hands, not to back away from the opportunity to involve Jews in their age-old privilege of being the voice of the Creator, the voice of creation, and to enlist your help.

It is my intention, over time, to start a cantorial school, not in criticism of the wonderful work of the Miller School and of JTS as a continuing center, but in partnership. One is not enough. What we have seen in rabbinical training is that the opening of the Ziegler School provided JTS with an opportunity to flourish and to grow. Both schools now have greater numbers than existed prior to the opening of the second center. So I’d like to invite your discussion and

your thoughtfulness concerning ways in which the West Coast and East Coast centers can enliven the cantorate, can enrich Conservative Judaism and can allow us more effectively to do the work that we need to do.

It's not about the uplift and the professionalization of the cantorate, although that will be an essential component to the work we do. It's not about teaching rabbis and cantors to respect each other, although that, also, is an essential component of the work we will do. It is ultimately about restoring to the Jewish people an unembarrassed love of God, a passion for *mitzvot*, a hunger for Torah and a thirst for justice. And in that, we must work together, or we deserve to fail. *Shalom*.

## Adapting to a Changing Congregation: How to Adapt So You Don't Need to Change Jobs

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein, Chair*

*Hazzanim Allan Robuck and Lorna Wallach-Kalet*

### *Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

I would like to change the emphasis of this presentation a bit to focus on how one establishes longevity in a congregation, which certainly includes the flexibility to change. Along with our panelists, we will put some thoughts on the table and then open to the floor for your input and recommendations. I would like this to be a session with a fair amount of give and take.

Here is what I've learned over the years, having served the same synagogue for 28 years: Congregants want to know that you sincerely care about them. In choosing a synagogue today, I am convinced, more than ever, potential members are concerned less about the affiliation of the congregation (Conservative, Orthodox, or Reform). Rather they are seeking a religious home where they sense that the clergy cares about them as individuals. This, in large measure, explains the success of Chabad. How do they attract so many unobservant Jews? The answer is that they convince those, who one would logically think would be more comfortable in a Conservative or Reform synagogue, that they care.

1 - Building relationships with the youth of the congregation, Junior choirs, Torah Reading societies, teaching music in the religious school can help in this regard. Again, as with the adults in your synagogue, you want the children to feel that you care about them individually. They will go home and tell their parents how wonderful the cantor is. Typically, in my congregation and many others, when B'nai Mitzvah present their "thank you" speeches, they rave about the cantor and then go on to say a few polite things about the rabbi. Traditionally, B'nai Mitzvah training has been a wonderful vehicle through which we establish strong and positive relationships with the families in our congregations.

2 - Become involved in many different facets of the synagogue's daily activities. Become an integral part of what is going on in your congregation. Attend the daily minyan with some regularity. Don't underestimate how much influence the minyannaires have in the politics of the synagogue.

3 - Spend a lot of time in the synagogue. Don't be one of those cantors who, when called, the secretary responds, "I don't know where s/he is nor when s/he'll be here."

4 - Choose a congregation that is financially sound. If your congregation

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is on the decline, seriously consider getting out of there before the age of 50. If they can't afford you, you aren't going to be able to keep your job.

5 - Change is constant and the pace of change is quicker than ever before. Be willing to adapt to change, from music in the synagogue to teaching techniques to assuming new and different responsibilities. Take the initiative of creating and implementing new ideas. Don't wait for the lay leadership to suggest that you do so.

6 - Nurture positive working relationships with other members of the synagogue staff (including the maintenance staff) and with your lay leadership.

7 - Make sure that you know, politically, what is going on in your congregation. At times, think of yourself as a politician who wants to remain in office.

8 - Don't be afraid to admit to mistakes. Saying, "I'm sorry" is not a sign of failure. It is rather an indication that you are confident enough in who you are and what you're doing to own up to your mistakes.

9 - Be a role model for others to emulate, both in your relationships to God and to people. More than ever, in today's society, congregants need role models.

10 - Maintain your skills and develop new ones — continue to study voice and engage in continuing education. Identify areas of weakness in your congregation. What can you do to be of help?

11 - Be the last one to leave the synagogue building on Shabbat morning. Stay around to greet as many congregants as possible during Kiddush.

#### *Hazzan Allan Robuck:*

Good morning. My favorite play and also one of my favorite movies is *Inherit the Wind*. Maybe you have read it or seen it. For those of you who don't know it, it's a fictional representation of the Scopes Monkey Trial, teaching the story of evolution. In the movie version, the very liberal attorney played by Spencer Tracy, is in a discussion with the very conservative attorney played by Frederick March. They're arguing about how they grew so far apart. Fred March turns to Spencer Tracy and says, "How is it that you have changed so much?" Tracy replies, "Actually, all motion is relative. You have changed by not moving." I took that very much to heart in everything I've done since I read that play in ninth grade and I've always made that an emphasis in everything I do — if I'm static, then I'm the one who's falling behind, because everything evolves. If you stop evolving, there's only one other answer, only one other future, and that's to go the other way.

I echo a lot of what Cantor Stein said, especially his mention of being

flexible. That goes to the idea of not locking yourself into what you think the hazzan must do. I didn't go to the Miller School to become a hazzan. I went to the Disney School. I worked as a musician at Walt Disney World for 12 years. My last four-and-one-half years there, I worked at an improv comedy club as the music director. It seems like a far stretch, but I learned a couple of interesting things.

One of the things I learned and have taken with me was, when someone hands you something or gives you an opening, don't just agree. Expand it and make it into something more interesting. Take their ideas and make them your own and then make them better. To do that, you have to be flexible enough. However, if someone says, "I'd really like to do x, y or z," don't say, "that's a great idea." Grab it and take it and do something with that idea.

Another thing which I think has endeared me to my constituency is that every time someone joins our synagogue, I take the time to send them a note — at least an email if not a hand-written note. I make it a point to say, "Please call me not just for your musical needs, but, if you're new to the community, where's the butcher shop," if you have a butcher shop in your town. We have *one* in Orlando. Where do the Jews live? In Orlando, it's everywhere, so it's very strange. People love that personal touch. I hope that you, too, would take the chance to make that personal contact.

Our congregation has grown from 440 to 750 members over the last eight years and it's not easy to get to know everybody. This year I've created a program called "Notes and Noshes." What does that mean? I will go to different parts of the community, different people's homes where they have a piano. The rabbi, the education director and the executive director will be there. I'm going to do some singing, some Jewish music and some maybe not-so-Jewish music. I'm fortunate that I have the ability to play piano — I've played in lounges for years. Then we're going to *shmooze* and get to know each other. We are specifically targeting those members who are relatively new to the congregation so that they're instantly bought in.

Steve talked about how Chabad is welcoming. We want our people to feel so welcome that the day they walk in the door, they'll feel like, "hey, these are my buddies." Not that we're not *k'lei kodesh*, but that we're approachable.

Steve also mentioned involvement with the children of the synagogue. Before I was a Disney World piano player, I was a junior high school teacher for six years, so this is my third career. Working with kids is what I love to do best. It's what I do best, I think. So I involve myself with the children of the congregation as much as humanly possible, even to the detriment of some of my other responsibilities. The board came to me a couple of years ago and said,

“Cantor, we know you’re very overworked. What would you like to give up?” I said, “Services.” They laughed just like you are laughing now. I said, “No, I’m serious. I’d be happy to give it up. You’re welcome to get someone else to *daven*. I just want to work.” Obviously, they didn’t let me get out of services, but the reality is that we are constantly looking for new ways to involve the kids.

We have a Junior Congregation that meets on Shabbat morning. The rabbi is on the *bimah*, and while he’s giving his sermon, either the assistant rabbi or I leave to go to Junior Congregation for 20 minutes. We do a little *d’var* and sing some songs and the kids know me because of that.

I teach sixth grade for one hour every Sunday, not because I love teaching sixth grade, but, when those kids become B’nai Mitzvah students the following year, I already know them. They know me. We’ve developed a wonderful relationship. And, I’ve already sent four progress reports to their parents so they know where I’m coming from and what I expect of the children. And so, that bond has already been created.

When I have a student in for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah lesson, I always strongly encourage the parents to come to the lesson, as well. I’m sure many of you do that. That way they know you’re not just in your office with their kid, they participate and they learn. I don’t know how many times I’ve had a parent say to me, “I didn’t know anything about the service until my son’s Bar Mitzvah.”

We’ve developed a lot of other interesting children’s programming. Four years ago we started doing an annual musical in the synagogue. We recruit kids from fourth through twelfth grade and pick a Broadway musical. I produce it along with the education director. I am the music director and she is the producer. Together, we found a congregant who had done some acting. She helps us with the acting part of it.

Other tremendously successful examples of things you can do, as Cantor Stein said, are teaching music in the school and creating or directing a youth choir. Last year, for the first time, I brought the youth choir into the High Holy Day services. Our synagogue is very traditional. We don’t use instruments in services and we do a full repetition — all the things a traditional synagogue would do. I brought the youth choir in to sing for the *hakafa*, and all of a sudden, instead of 175 people being there for the beginning of the Torah service, there were 475 people because they wanted to see their kid dressed up in pretty clothes singing in the High Holy Day services. Likewise, the kids get a chance to be in that big room and see all those people.

There is another thing I want to share with you. I think this is very important and perhaps something Steve may not have wanted to mention. We

all know what is supposed to be the “traditional” conflict between the rabbi and the hazzan. I never had that conflict. I was actually a member of my synagogue before I became the hazzan. I liked our rabbi when I was in the *kahal*, and I like him even more on the *bimah*. Of course, we don’t always agree — you’re never going to agree all the time with the other professionals on your staff. The most important thing I could say about that is, make sure you don’t ever leak your emotions to the congregants. When you’re sitting on the *bimah* and the rabbi talks about or does something that pushes your buttons, or if you’re singing and the rabbi starts singing along very loudly into his or her microphone and it’s really bothering the heck out of you, don’t look over and give him or her a nasty look. Instead, smile and enjoy their participation. Afterwards you might say, “You know, when I sang that particular part, you were in the wrong key,” for example. After 18 years, my congregation thinks that the rabbi and I are absolutely the best friends in the world. In reality, we’re no longer such great friends as we used to be. It’s a long story. But as far as the congregation knows, the *kahal* thinks that we are the best of friends because of what they see on the bima. Because of that, they feel that the connection they can get from going to either one of the rabbis, can also be felt with me. They use me to open the door for them to meet with the rabbi.

One last thing. Don’t negotiate your own contract. You’ve probably heard that before. I hired a good friend who was a businessman to go in and negotiate my contract. We sat down with some parameters. They liked him so much that they made him the Executive Director of the synagogue. I don’t have to negotiate anymore because he got me a lifetime contract. Now I don’t have to worry about it precisely because I didn’t go in and create an adversarial relationship with them. We presented reasonable demands — at least I thought they were reasonable. They didn’t always agree, but because of the fact that I wasn’t put in that confrontational position, there was never any bitterness between members of the board and myself. As a result, I now have a good friend who is the Executive Director and a good friend who is the rabbi. I’m going to be there until I either quit singing or we move into the new building, which is, hopefully, going to be finished next year. Thanks a lot.

*Hazzan Lorna Wallach-Kallet:*

I need to tell you that I feel a little bit uncomfortable standing here talking about myself. I don’t love to talk about myself, and I certainly don’t want you to think I’m bragging.

You’re all wonderful hazzanim, and I would like you to remember that much of what goes wrong in congregations really is not your fault. Likely, it’s

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things that are out of your control. I have been incredibly blessed. I've been fortunate to have been in two separate congregations that were vibrant, very stable congregations. I worked with wonderful rabbis and never had a problem. I was in my first congregation in Manhattan for nine years, the first two of them as a student. They put up with all my mistakes, my real lack of experience, and they kept me on after that, which was very gratifying to me.

I couldn't say no to Steven Stein when he asked me to do this. I can share some things with you from my own experience. I know there are many people who face challenges and difficulties in their congregations, and some of these people are very close friends. When I speak to them and hear what they're going through, I stop, daily, and say, "thank God I have what I have." I do not take what I have for granted. It takes work. I wish I had some special wisdom or some magical answers to be able to stand here and say, "this is what you have to do to be in a congregation for a long time." I've never even been to Disney World, so I can't go that route. Allan took care of that. I've been a hazzan for 19 years so I hope you'll benefit a little bit from some of the stories I want to share. I hope you'll see that they're models of leadership in a style which has worked for me.

Something occurred to me as our previous panelists were speaking. When you begin a relationship with a new congregation, remember that congregations don't love change either. When they hire you or the rabbi or any professional, they really hope that it's going to be a long-term relationship. They're not hiring you and thinking, "Okay, in a year or two we'll make a change." These are volunteers who have spent a lot of time that they may not have had to share, or time away from their families or their jobs to go through this process of interviewing, reading over resumes and listening to CDs. They really want to make the relationship work. Knowing that, it means that whatever you need to do to help make it work, it's your responsibility to follow through with that. Like any marriage, you go into it hoping that this is going to be happily ever after. We all know it takes work. Someone here just celebrated 64 years of marriage. That's amazing. If you think of your position like that kind of relationship, I think you will realize that it takes constant effort.

When I first began in my present congregation, when I was negotiating my first contract, I was handed a job description. It had a list of maybe 20 or 25 responsibilities that would be expected of me, but there was really nothing unreasonable in that list. Everything seemed to be what I was trained to do, these are things I know how to do. One of the responsibilities that was expected of me was to read a column of Torah each week. I have to tell you that, in the ten years I've been there, only in the first year did I read quite a bit of Torah.

Except for the summer, when it's very difficult to find volunteer readers, I haven't had to read Torah in about nine years. How did that happen? What did I do? Even though it's in my job description I didn't know if that meant they really wanted to hear the hazzan read Torah. What I saw was a need. People wanted to participate in the service. We have a very traditional service, similar to the one Allan described, with a full repetition and a full *k'ri'a*. People from the congregation were reading Torah when I started, so that there was already a pool of about 25 or so volunteers in rotation. I did all the assigning and made sure everything was covered.

I thought this would be a wonderful way to get even more people involved in our service and make it a little more participatory, as well as empowering them. I approached people and said, "Any time there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, I strongly encourage the parents to read, even with our full *k'ri'a*." I was given the permission to divide up *aliyot*, so if someone can only read the minimum of three *p'sukim* for an *aliyah*, that's what we do, and then we have an extra *aliyah*. Sometimes we have *hosafot*, sometimes we have as many as 12 *aliyot*. But, you know what? If it allows members of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah's family to participate in the service, for a parent to be a role model for their child, it's incredibly powerful.

I developed this whole program and now we have more than 100 volunteers reading Torah each week, so that the rabbi and I almost never have to read. Also, when I started, there was a paid Torah reader with a budget for that purpose. Now, we've practically stopped using him altogether, except occasionally in the summer or when the rabbi and I both are away at the same time. We use our paid reader along with volunteers. It's an incredible program.

Another thing I want to share is, again, about the job description. I've learned that it's really critical to evaluate constantly what you're doing. Both Steve and Allan have said this. Look at what you think the needs of the congregation are, whether you're relevant and whether you're fulfilling those needs. For yourself, you also need to grow professionally as a hazzan.

I like having feedback. Being in the same congregation for a number of years you have the opportunity to develop relationships. Find people you trust to get their feedback. Sometimes people give unsolicited feedback. Sometimes that has mean intentions, so you must learn to brush those off and ignore them.

People say these things because they want to help you or because they feel that something isn't in the best interest of the congregation, but you also ought to be able to know when people say things because it's in their own best interest. Get past that and you'll find people whose opinions you can trust.

In the congregation where I am now, I've found that talking to members

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through training B'nai Mitzvah is an incredible way to develop relationships with families, with the children and their parents.

I recognize that many people felt our service was inaccessible to them. Our service is entirely in Hebrew. The one thing we read in English is the prayer for the country. When we get to that prayer, all of a sudden I can hear many voices. I don't face the congregation, I face the *aron*. It's only when I turn around that I realize, wow, there are a lot of people here. I can't know how many people are there because most people are not able to participate in much of the service. They don't know the Hebrew and they don't know the melodies. We have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah almost every week, so there are usually a lot of guests in our congregation. But, all of a sudden, when we get to the prayer for the country, everybody's reading because it's in English.

I discovered that people felt that our *siddur* did not speak to them. We were using the Silverman *siddur*. If you've used the Silverman *siddur*, you know that it's not easy to read anything in English. The language just doesn't speak to people. It's not beautiful poetry, nor is it a good translation of the Hebrew. It's impossible to have a spiritual experience reading prayer in Silverman's English.

I made it my campaign to look into changing the *siddur* we were using. The very first thing, alluded to by both of our previous speakers, is that you have to be together with the rabbi. Anything new I do, I consult the rabbi first. He is the *mara d'atra*. I am not the rabbi of the congregation. I was not hired to be the rabbi of the congregation. I fully accept that the rabbi has a certain role and I have a different role, and a lot depends on what kind of model your rabbi has set up. My rabbi makes it very clear that he is the *mara d'atra* and that he makes the decisions.

Yet he was actually not prepared to make the decision about changing the *siddur* on his own. Instead, he brought it to our Religious Affairs committee which evaluates things that are going on in the sanctuary and any part of the service. He and I actually disagreed on this issue. He felt that it was more important to keep the Silverman *siddur* because this was what our more traditional people were used to. Everyone knew the pages and was comfortable with it. He also felt that the image of the congregation might change. He had some valid reasons and I was afraid my suggestion wasn't going to work.

I came to the change not for myself because I can obviously daven from any *siddur*. It didn't matter to me so much, personally, because I don't read the English. I did it for the people I had spoken to during my first five years in the congregation. When it finally came to the big meeting at the Religious Affairs committee, the rabbi and I were both asked to speak. We waited until everyone

on the committee expressed their opinion, their views, before we spoke. I guess I didn't realize until later how passionately I spoke about it. The vote was taken and the decision made to change to *Siddur Sim Shalom*. I saw the chairperson of the committee a few days later, and he said, "I think that because you showed us so much passion about this issue, we saw that this was something that was truly important to you because of the passion that you showed for it."

The whole process of changing the *siddur* was an important learning experience. By the way, for perhaps the first two months after we changed the *siddur*, we were getting used to the different pages. As an example, for *musaf* or *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh* you have to skip over a few parts, but everyone figured it out. And now, after four or five years of using this *siddur* there are no complaints. Everyone's perfectly happy.

I realized that you have to pick and choose your battles. I don't make a fuss about all the little things that come up. But people realize that when something is really important to me, they perk up their ears and take it seriously. I hope what I'm trying to say is clear. You can make an issue about a lot of different things, but if you wait or if you pick the ones that are really important to you and you're not somebody who's always *kvetching* or crying, they will listen.

I do my own photocopying. We have secretarial help, but I do a lot of things myself just because that's who I am. That's what I like to do. So I don't ask for a lot of things. But when I do ask they listen.

I've never used anyone to negotiate a contract for me. I've negotiated a contract four times in my previous congregation and three times in my present congregation. The first contract was three years, the second was five, and I just negotiated an eight-year contract. I've always done it myself and never had a problem with any members of the congregation or any board members. This is a different model which might work for different people. You have to know yourself, what you think will work best for you and your comfort level, how you think it's going to be after the fact. I've never had a problem.

Another thing I've realized working in congregations and negotiating my own contract for all these years is that the majority of your members have no idea what you do or how much you do. The ones who come to *shul* once in a while and on the High Holy Days see some of the things you do. If you write a bulletin article, they see that. I use those bulletin articles to inform people about what I'm doing, because people actually read them and they tell me that they read them. So I make sure to write an article every month.

But the majority of people have no idea what you do. I make a list for myself of every little thing that I do for the congregation from one contract to the next, so that when I go to negotiate a contract I can give them the whole

picture.

Once a week I go to the nursery school and read a story. The only people who know that I go to the nursery school to read a story are not even members, so they don't interact with anyone else in the congregation. They have their own little sub-community there. The kids know, but I'm not certain they go home and tell their parents that they heard a story from the cantor. So I have to make sure that everybody knows everything that I'm doing in the congregation. Many members have no idea that I co-officiate at funerals with the rabbi. If they don't show up at the funerals, how would they know that the cantor is there also?

I make sure that each time I negotiate, when I go to talk to the committee which is negotiating with me, I bring my list so at least they know, and hopefully they take it back to the Board. It also enables the job description to change from one contract to the next.

I am the last one to leave the synagogue on Saturday after the *Kiddush*. We always have a pretty nice spread. There's usually bagels and gefilte fish, enough so that even if there's no Bar or Bat Mitzvah, people hang out and talk and eat a little bit of lunch. That is time when you're working, making it your business to talk to everyone in the room. My husband knows that's not the time to bring my kids in. I have two children and they're in the *shul* with me on most *Shabbatot* and holidays. They go to their kids' service but don't come to talk to me during the *Kiddush* because I'm still working. That is a time to build relationships, you *shmooze* with people and show them that you're not in a rush to get away from them.

I also don't schedule appointments immediately following the daily *minyanim*. Even if it's just for five minutes, people sometimes hang around after *minyan*. They want to be able to talk to you. These are not necessarily people who are going to make an appointment to come see you during your office hours. So you come to *minyan* and you spend five minutes afterwards. You might say, "How was your day?" Or "how did your son do in the show he was in?" You find out things they're doing, you've got to try to remember them. We have 500 families, so you speak to them about specific things and, sometimes, they'll ask you things. Those are the times and the places where I think relationships are built.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

It is not an accident the Allan and Lorna have been in their congregations for so many years. This does not happen by chance. Obviously, it is because they have had a tremendous impact on the lives of their congregants.

I'm glad that Lorna made the comment she did about *Shabbat* morning. My wife and I are also the last ones to leave. My rabbi, who is relatively new, was criticized because people sensed he was in a rush to leave during the *Kiddush*. Now he stays a little bit longer, although not as long as he could.

Relative to negotiating a contract, there is no right or wrong answer. What I can tell you is that in some cases, it is absolutely crucial to engage an attorney. There are also many circumstances in which colleagues call me for advice and I advise against an attorney. There are so many criteria involved. It depends on the circumstances, on how good you are in negotiating for yourself or if there are adversarial circumstances involved. When these things come up, please don't hesitate to call me and I'll help you.

I alluded to this earlier and Lorna touched on it: It is so important to treat everybody in your synagogue with great respect. I have a very close relationship with the maintenance man — he's a lovely, lovely guy. When we need something fixed at our house, he comes to help us. Around the holiday time I always give him a nice holiday check. I tell you in all sincerity, there's nothing I wouldn't do for this man.

I've heard all too often that the rabbi or cantor is only there for the *makher*, not the average Joe. Please treat every member the same. Be there for every single member, whether they're wealthy or not of financial means and treat the maintenance people as well as you treat the *makhers*.

*Question:*

Regarding contract negotiations, I just finished negotiating a five-year contract. One thing I wanted to add into my new contract was a severance clause, something with which I had very little experience. I called the CA. They were tremendously helpful by sending me a template contract that included the severance language. I went through it and it sounded like everything I was looking for. It sounded very fair and very balanced. I presented it to the people with whom I was negotiating. Because they thought it looked very fair and balanced, they were willing to work with me. None of us has enough experience in how to word it properly. The CA can help you by providing a template which you can look over before you negotiate so you have a basis for beginning.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

I don't want to go off topic, but many of you know that's probably my number one pet peeve — to make sure you have a mediation/arbitration clause in your contract as well as a severance clause. Sheldon Levin represents us on the Committee of Congregational Standards. When those provisions are there and

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there is a conflict, there is a mechanism in place for resolution. When they're not there, it's a very serious problem.

*Question:*

I'm so grateful for this session. I got so many wonderful thoughts and ideas, some of which I do and some that I will do. I want to make sure everyone knows about the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson. You've got to get this tiny book. You can read it in under an hour. It is the best thing I've ever read about change and understanding your relationship to change. It's funny and it's charming. I very highly recommend it. It's even more important than anything I've read. Every couple of years I reread it. My mother had a hysterical moment — I said, "Ma, you gotta think about this! So the cheese moved, so go, move."

In terms of relationship building, I'm really grateful for hearing both of you talk about not leaving the *shul* and being the last people out. I'd gotten to a point on Friday evening where I thought, "these people can stay all night, but I want to go back and check out the Torah reading." I would say, "Bye, guys, I gotta go work on a Torah reading." Now I think that's the wrong message to give. Not that I think I need to cut off one piece of work to do another piece of work, but that I should have done the other in advance so that I can hang out with them. Thank you for that.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

If the congregation loves you, that's really half the battle. I remember years ago, Saul Meisels, *alav hashalom*, said something I'll never forget. Unfortunately, some of you only know his name because of the presentation that was made Sunday night. Saul got up at a Convention and said, "They may respect the rabbi and they may pay him more, but they *don't* love the rabbi the way they love the hazzan." In most cases, it's true.

*Question:*

I've been retired for ten years. My congregation gave me a retirement stipend and an allowance. When I made the agreement with them, I brought a lawyer because if I didn't, it never would have happened. They were very nice about it. They liked it because the people who are negotiating with you are lawyers, accountants and professional people. They know how to cut a certain percentage of what you're requesting, but if they like it, I guess they'll give it to you. My congregation thought they would only have to pay for one or two years, but I've been away for ten years and the checks still keep coming. It's a great congregation.

I was also able to get a sabbatical. When they asked me when I wanted it, I said, "Next year is fine because I've been here seven years," but they couldn't give it to me the next year. We negotiated further. I wanted to know, "Is there light at the end of the tunnel? When would you be willing to give me a sabbatical?" Sol Mendelson told me to tell them it would not cost them anything extra above what they would pay me as salary. With my salary, I was able to pay seven people to take over during the one year we went to Israel with our family. It was a wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime experience. If you prepare the congregation and tell them what your needs are, and if you're loved by them, I don't think there will be any problem.

There's one theme that brought up by Steve today in which I strongly believe. Although I was loved in my synagogue, I was the hazzan and not the rabbi. By that I mean that while my rabbi loved me and I loved him, too, I really was playing second fiddle, so to speak. In some ways we were not colleagues. When we were on the pulpit I wanted us to be colleagues, on the same level. Where I noticed the difference was when we had an assistant rabbi join the congregation. The assistant rabbi was on the same level as the rabbi. That's what I think goes on in most congregations. And still, the kids at a Bar Mitzvah celebration thank the hazzan for training them, and the rabbi is only mentioned. The hazzan always comes first because you work with the child for about 12 months. You have a relationship and that's what the child remembers. But the congregation does not respect the hazzan on the same level as the rabbi as far as scholarship and professionalism.

In *Gaonic* times, all hazzanim were rabbis before they became hazzanim, so what I want to hear from Steve is that the Seminary will train hazzanim to be rabbis. If we engage in the same studies as rabbis, and earn the title "Rabbi," will we get to be on the same level as the rabbis? Then he or she can call you a colleague — I think that's a very important step. I would be more than happy to be on a committee that would help the Seminary start a program in which hazzanim can become rabbis.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

It's in the pipeline. There is so much to be said about rabbi/cantor relationships. It's a whole other topic about which you will be hearing. There are a lot of really positive things that are happening in terms of the education of rabbis and cantors, studying together, initiatives that have begun, collaborations between the RA and the CA. As all of you know, this is a very high priority for me.

*Question:*

I'm a non-member. I belong to GTM (Guild of Temple Musicians) and even though I am a man, I'm involved with WCN (Women's Cantors Network). I want to thank everyone for making me feel as one of the group. In listening to the comments, one powerful thing we have at Bolton Street Synagogue, an unaffiliated congregation in Baltimore, is the "performance evaluation." Usually what happens is that in looking at my year, I have three opportunities to talk to the congregation to explain what *I* need and listen to what they need, so it's a conversation rather than a one-way street. That performance evaluation goes two ways. Do you find that is an opportunity to set up a communication, to get to know what you need, what you want and what the congregation needs and wants?

*Question:*

This is something I did this year which was really beneficial. I don't know if you know what a "survey monkey" is. You set up an internet website where someone can go and check off what they like — a little less, a little more. It's not very difficult to do, you don't have to be very technologically savvy. I've done this the last two years, asking about Bar Mitzvah training, what I do in the school, what they like about the singing in the services. No one has to sign it. It's been very enlightening to me as far as what's going on out there and what they are thinking. People are very hesitant to say, "By the way, Hazzan, I hate the way you're doing that!" But if you put it in an anonymous place, that gives them an opportunity to give you lots of feedback. It really worked well for me.

I always have a businessman negotiate for me because I don't want two lawyers going at it.

Another thing about evaluations: I hope all of you do this. I insist that every year I have a proper evaluation like an employee of any other company. I got this idea partly because my wife is an executive of a large corporation (so I can afford to be a hazzan). She's in charge of evaluating hundreds of employees. Every year, I self-evaluate, the rabbi and the president of the synagogue evaluate me and then we sit down and discuss what we feel, what are some goals for next year, what are the things I'm not doing well. I agree with what you said about knowing what's coming — it's so very important that you know what your congregants are feeling about what you're doing. You may think your program is the best ever, but people will eventually vote with their feet. It's important to get to them before they vote.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

By the way, you should know that there is an evaluation document that the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Assembly and the Cantors Assembly worked on together to make sure that it is, in fact, a fair process.

*Question:*

A comment and a question. Since we would never undertake a change of *siddur* because of the expense, I prepared a guide to our *Shabbat* morning services so that everyone who comes to *shul* gets a little booklet. I go through each of the *t'fillot* we do, so it's as if I'm sitting beside them, talking about what's going on in each particular *t'fillah*. It fulfills a few things: it shows that I, myself, know what I'm saying, it shows that I am doing something other than just *davening* and it helps people. I also do a monthly learners' *minyan*. I let one of my kids *daven shacharit* once a month so that I am free to lead a learner's *minyan*.

I'm now completing my tenth year in my shul in Hollywood, FL and for eight of those years my rabbi and I were best buddies — we went to the gym every morning together, there was not a *shabbat* which our families didn't spend together. He left Florida for Minnesota for some bizarre reason. I became the *Kol Bo* for a year and now we have a new rabbi. That has been the most challenging thing I've ever faced in my career. I'm really easy-going, I get along with everybody but this has been a real challenge. I know we're not going to be going to the gym or hanging out together, but I'm trying to develop a relationship with the rabbi so that we can work together and make the *shul* grow.

Talking about change, this is one of the biggest changes a hazzan can go through. I hope you may have other suggestions for me, but one thing I've done which I think may work is that I've found a project on which we can both work really closely together. We're writing a new Friday evening *siddur* together. It's interesting because we have such different approaches to things, so it will be fun to see if we can work it all out. So I was wondering if any of you have any ideas because that's a change in the synagogue the hazzan has to adapt to. Thanks.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

I'd like to meet with you privately to find out a little more about your rabbi, but very briefly, I would try to develop some sort of a social relationship with him. I can tell you that with the last three rabbis I've worked with we've always had one *seder* in his home and one *seder* in my home and we have shared *chagim* together. My first rabbi took the initiative, the last two, I took the initiative to make that happen.

*Question:*

One elaboration of what Steve said — yes, everyone should spend as much time as possible in the office, but no matter how much time you spend there, the secretary should never say, “I don’t know where he is.” Your secretary should always know exactly where you are, whether you’re visiting at the hospital or some other task, so that she will be able to say, “I’ll have him call you back.” Irrespective of how much time you spend in the office, the secretary should never say, “I don’t know where he is.”

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

Although more and more often, people have voice mail.

*Question:*

I am a *Kol Bo*. Last year, I asked Rick Berlin who was functioning as a *Kol Bo*, “How has it been for you?” He said, “Sometimes the rabbi and the cantor don’t agree with each other.” I am here to tell you, with a year of doing it myself under my belt, he was deadly serious. I have *never* been so conflicted in my entire career as I’ve been in playing this dual role. I realize just how differently I have to think about things in meeting their needs, whether I’m thinking from the perspective of a rabbi or of a hazzan. We have to talk more about that in some other venue.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

You know, at cantors’ conventions we tend to be critical of rabbis, unfortunately at times too critical. But think about it — take a moment — put yourself in their shoes and think about what a very, very difficult job they have.

*Question:*

Having spent 35 years in one congregation, I want to compliment all three presenters. The thing that moved me most was Steve Stein’s list, which he gave at the beginning. I think that list is so important. I want to add one thing to the list which is one of the points Lorna brought up. That is, her advice to pick your battles and make them the major things that are really, really important. So many times over the course of many years, I swallowed something unpleasant in order not to let it blow up into something big. I think it’s really, really important to wait until there’s a real issue that you feel very, very strongly about in order to take a stand. Steve, I think your list is so important that it should be widely circulated among our membership and maybe even made into some type of a plaque that you can keep on your wall, not in view of your congregants, but on

a wall you will see every day.

*Hazzan Stephen J. Stein:*

One last comment: There are so many stresses in this profession, don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to ask for advice. Whether it's from the Cantors Assembly or from some outside professional. Sometimes we need to go to others — we just don't have the answers ourselves. Sometimes we think we're invincible and we should be able to solve all of our problems ourselves — it's not always possible.

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## On Being a Good Person in a Complicated World

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

I want to explain how I came to write a Code of Ethics. One of the sad things that happened to Jewish life in modernity is that the word “religious” has become increasingly associated in people’s minds exclusively with ritual observance. So that if two Jews are speaking about a third, a not uncommon occurrence in Jewish life, and the question is raised, “Is so-and-so religious?” the answer — yes or no — is always going to be given based exclusively on the person’s ritual observances. He keeps *Shabbat*, he keeps kosher, he is religious. He doesn’t. He’s not. From which one could form the very odd impression that, in Judaism, ethics is an extracurricular activity.

I say this as a Jew, like many of you, as passionately committed to ritual observances *bein adam laMakom* — laws between people and God — for three reasons. One is that without the rituals, we don’t have holiness. Any of us who has ever experienced a meaningful and spiritually fulfilling *Shabbat* knows that the spiritual fulfillment inevitably ties in with the rituals. I’ll just give you one example that comes to mind.

Obviously, the *Shabbat* is inaugurated according to Jewish law with the lighting of two candles. I’m curious. By show of hands, in how many of your families have you practiced the custom of lighting an additional candle for each child in the house? Okay, very many. This is the highest percentage I’ve ever got when I’ve asked that of an audience. It’s a wonderful custom. I grew up in a household where my parents did it.

Abraham Twersky, the Chassidic rebbe who’s also a psychiatrist, told me that he grew up in a household where his parents lit a candle for each child as they were born. He made a wonderful comment, “It was wonderful for me to know as a child that because I existed, every Friday night there was more light in my parents’ household.” What Twersky was identifying there was the capacity of ritual to speak the language of poetry. All parents tell their children that they love them, and, hopefully, they tell them that many times. Twenty years later, many of those children end up in therapists’ offices saying, they never felt loved by their parents. So, one of the things rituals can do, is it gives us another way to ritually deepen, make holy, and even express love.

Without rituals, we wouldn’t have Jewish continuity. More than 3000 years ago, we were liberated from Egyptian slavery, an event that Michael Walzer, the political scientist, has argued has influenced more movements of social justice than any other event in recorded narrative literature. Yet, if we as Jews didn’t commemorate that event every year with a *Seder*, the event would

still be there. The event would still influence people. But, we, as a people, would no longer exist.

I'll give you another example. When was George Washington's birthday? This is not a trick question. February 22. In essence, we're the last generation of Americans who are going to know that, because, now, all the presidents' birthdays have been thrown together into one Presidents' Day, the third Monday in February, which is supposed to honor all presidents but, in effect, honors none.

Could you imagine if a group of Jewish scholars got together and said, "You know how we could increase attendance in shul on *Yom Kippur*? Let's standardize the date. From now on, *Yom Kippur* will be the first Sunday in October." What would happen? I think within a few years the fall off in attendance at *shuls* would be enormous because part of the power of rituals is that you have to adjust your life to the ritual. If the moment a ritual becomes inconvenient, it can be dispensed with, what you're really saying is it has no intrinsic significance.

Part of the power of Jewish holidays is that, in 3000 years, never once have they arrived on time. Every year, people say, "the holidays are early this year" or "the holidays are late this year" — but that's part of the charm of the holidays.

And ethics can communicate ethical lessons. When I was growing up in the 1950s, there was far less *kosher* supervision than there is today in the United States. Today, you can literally go to a supermarket virtually anywhere in the country and find an enormous number of products under rabbinical supervision.

When I was a kid, I grew up in a religious household. If you kept *kosher*, then you were very strict about *hashgachah*, about supervision on meat products, and when it came to dairy products, basically, you checked ingredients. I remember that my friend with whom I grew up, Dennis Prager, once said to me "when I was six years old, the first words I learned to read in English were 'pure vegetable shortening only.'" He said, "It was not a bad thing to learn at the age of six, that you couldn't have every candy bar in the candy store."

So I'm a passionate believer in *bein adam laMakom*.

Having said that, we do a terrible disservice to Judaism when we've allowed the ethical to become regarded as much less significant. I'll give you even one more manifestation, interestingly, of that. Probably the best-known story in the *Talmud* is the story of the Gentile who comes to Hillel and says to him, "Teach me the essence of Judaism while I'm standing on one foot." Hillel, of course, responds, "What's hateful unto you, don't do unto your neighbor. The rest is commentary. *Zil gamar*, now go and study."

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I would venture to guess that everyone here is familiar with that story, but I told it with one error. Does anybody know, what did the non-Jew actually say to Hillel? He didn't say, "Teach me the essence of Judaism while standing on one foot." The story is even more radical than people realize. Does anyone remember what he said?

He said, "*Geir'eini al m'nat* — convert me to Judaism on condition that you can teach me it on one foot." And it's on the basis of his coming with a request to be converted that Hillel answers, "The essence of it is the ethical," and converts him.

This caused no little discomfort to the *nos'ei keilim* — the commentaries on the *Talmud*. *Tosafot* said Hillel, in his great wisdom, could see that the man was going to become fully observant. But it's very, very fascinating that it's not just a normal *aggadic* narrative story. There's a *halakhic* implication. A non-Jew asks the greatest rabbi of his age to convert him, and Hillel is willing to do it on the basis on the man's acceptance of ethics. So we have to take it very, very seriously.

Sometimes, people would accuse me and say, "oh, you're trying to reduce Judaism to ethics." First of all, it's not a reduction. But, secondly, there's a basis for it in Jewish sources as well. Any time you try to put together a code of Jewish teachings on a subject, obviously you're going to start with certain premises. One of the premises that drove me in the book is very much Judaism's radical insistence on free will — certainly free will in the moral sphere.

So you'll say, so what's the big *chiddush*? Doesn't everybody believe in free will? The answer is, not really. Think about the world from an atheist perspective for a moment. If you presume that all that exists is the physical, what then are generally regarded as the determinants of human behavior?

Two things are commonly pointed to. Heredity and environment. I remember I once saw a cartoon showing a young boy about ten looking at his report card filled with Ds and Fs. Over his shoulder stands his scowling father and the kid is saying, "What do you think it is, Dad, heredity or environment?"

Probably the most famous defense lawyer in American history — the most famous lawyer in American history — was also America's most famous religious skeptic, Clarence Darrow. It is well known, of course, that Darrow was the most eloquent opponent of capital punishment of his age, and that is obviously no surprise. One would expect a criminal defense lawyer to be opposed to capital punishment.

What is less known about Darrow is that Darrow opposed all punishment. He thought all jails were wrong, all punishment was wrong, exactly for the reason I just said. As he wrote, "All people are the product of two things

and two things only: heredity and environment. They act in exact accord with the heredity which they took from their past and for which they are in no way responsible, and from the environment. All of us act from the same way."

Judaism adds to the equation that there's a *neshama*, there's a soul, and that soul gives human beings free will in the moral sphere. I emphasize, in the moral sphere. It doesn't apply in all spheres of life. Had I devoted my years to the study of chemistry, the world of chemistry would not have profited thereby.

We learn early on what our abilities are, just as I'm sure most of you recognized early on, your abilities with your voices. We know early on what our strengths are, and that's very, very important, particularly in an American society which I think disproportionately puts emphasis on people dealing with their weaknesses.

Parents go into a parent-teacher's conference. They get four good reports and one bad report. Suddenly, the most important subject is where they got the bad report. Even though we should know that by the age of 10 or 12 or 15, the likelihood that the subject in which your child is doing poorly will have any significance in their life, is remote. You want them to pass. You want them to do well enough to get their degree and to be able to get into college.

But people put too much emphasis, I believe, on weaknesses rather than on strengths. So, as I said, my strengths were not in the sciences, so I didn't have really free will to be great there. And in the physical sphere, how many of you, at some point in your life, have been joggers? How many of you are able to run 8-minute miles? 7-minute miles? 6-minute miles? 5-minute miles? I'm speaking to a Jewish audience. Someone ran a sub-5-minute mile back there. Wait, wait. People, please sit down. You're blocking my view. How fast a mile did you run? Wow, okay, fine. Generally, in Jewish audiences, people get applauded for 7-minute miles. I'm talking about heredity.

I'll tell you a funny story. A number of years ago I was speaking about this issue of free will and present in the audience was a man named Eric Kandell, who, around 1990, won the Nobel Prize in Physiology in Medicine. I had a very sharply angled lectern, and as I was speaking, my notes kept falling off. I am a *klutz* in all these things, so Eric ran up and adjusted my lectern so my notes could stay put. And I laughed, because I remember when I was a kid, they used to say things like, you know, you don't have to be an Einstein to do that, and then I had to have a Nobel Prize winner adjust my lectern.

Later in the speech, I asked the question about running, and his hand didn't go down, even at five minutes. It turns out as a kid, he had gone to the Yeshiva of Flatbush Elementary School, where I had attended, and then had gone to Erasmus High School, joined the track team, and ran a 4:50-mile. I

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looked at him and I said, “Eric, it is clear that your mission in life is to make everybody else here feel incompetent. It’s not enough that you won a Nobel Prize, you had to run a 4:50-mile. *Genug!* This is enough. In fact, it’s too much.”

But the truth is in the moral sphere, Judaism insists that we have moral responsibilities and we have free will. Maimonides puts it very well. He said, “Without free will, the prophets make no sense.” What is the point of Torah law telling people to act in a certain way, to refrain from bad behavior, if we don’t have free will? So everything depends on that notion.

Remarkably, if you look in the *Talmud*, the rabbis, in an interesting way, expand the dimensions of free will. My favorite of all *mishnayot* is the fourth *perek* of *Pirke Avot*, the first *Mishnah*, which is a fairly well-known *Mishnah*. An insight about it occurred to me one day. It’s a *Mishnah* that starts with a series of questions. *Eizehu chakham?* To which the answer is: *Halomeid mikol adam*, one who learns from everybody.

Interestingly, it’s asked elsewhere in the *Gemara* and a different answer is given, which is equally smart, *haro’et hanolad*, the one who foresees the future consequences of his or her actions. But *Pirke Avot* says, “one who learns from everybody.” There’s a universal implication. The words used, *halomeid mikol adam*, clearly means all people — Jews and non-Jews alike.

Normally we’d say wisdom is restricted. To some extent, we’re limited by our IQ. The percentage of people in any society who are regarded as very bright is very small. But what the rabbis do is they say, no, it’s open to everyone. If you’re willing to learn from everyone, you will become wise.

Conversely, if all you do is go around thinking you should teach other people but aren’t continually learning, you will become not only a boor, but you, yourself, will become less wise. So wisdom is now made accessible to everyone.

Probably the best known of the questions is, *Eizehu ashir?* Who is rich? To which the answer is: *Hasamei’ach b’chelko* — one who is happy with what he has. Again, normally, the percentage of people in a society who can be regarded as very rich, is small. It’s really a small percentage, and not accessible to most of us. Usually, if you’re not born rich, it’s unlikely you’ll become rich. Also, richness changes. When I was a child growing up in Brooklyn in the ’50s, if anyone had a million dollars, they were regarded as extremely wealthy. Now they could make a down payment on an apartment in Manhattan.

So, what does it really mean to be rich? The rabbis were onto something. Being rich means that you don’t have to worry about money all the time. If you have enormous amounts of money but you’re always worrying about your money, in that sense, you’re not really rich. If you can be happy with what you have, then again, suddenly, wealth, something normally restricted to a

minuscule percentage of the populous, is suddenly available and accessible.

A third question they ask here is, *Eizehu gibbor*? In the question, the word *gibbor* originally meant “one who is strong,” but as anybody knows, later in Hebrew, it came to have the connotation as “one who is a hero.” The answer is, *Hakoveish et yitzro* — one who can overcome his impulses — usually meaning evil impulses.

I remember my daughter, Naomi, once said to me that when she was two years old, she thought I was the bravest man in the world — a belief that was shattered when she was four years old and we went to an amusement park and I wouldn’t go on the roller coaster.

First of all, heroism is restricted by fears that we might have, of certain physical fears. Secondly, even if somebody is very brave in the conventional sense, how often in life will he or she be called upon to be a hero? So it’s something that will come up very rarely. It’s important when it comes up, but it’s very rare. By saying that one who can overcome his bad impulses is a hero, Judaism is doing something remarkable. It’s making heroism something that we can deal with every day, because the strongest battles we have to fight are usually internal ones.

What I wanted to do in Volume 1 of the code, which I subtitled “You Shall Be Holy,” really has to do with battles between a person and himself. How do we work on refining our own character? Volume 2, which I’m in the process of completing the editing, “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” deals more with interpersonal ethics. The goal is to systematically bring together Jewish teachings on a subject.

I dealt with 22 different virtues in Volume 1. One of them is the issue of forgiveness. When I sat down to write the code, I didn’t want to just end up repeating what I had written in previous books, so I started to relearn all the sources. I sat there in the most old-fashioned way with note cards, and when I had a few hundred note cards on a subject, I started organizing them.

What I noticed when I was organizing my note cards on the subject of forgiveness was there are really three Jewish attitudes on forgiveness. There are times when it’s obligatory, there are times when it’s optional, and, what’s unusual is that there are times when it’s forbidden.

When is forgiveness obligatory? The large majority of the time. The overwhelming majority of the time. When someone has caused you pain, but it is not irrevocable and the person asks for forgiveness, you’re obligated to give it. Let’s say you’re too angry to give it. So, you can think it over, but you have to give it by the third time. Maimonides writes, if you don’t forgive by the third time, you become an *achzari*. You become a cruel person.

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And it has to be on three separate occasions. A person can't say to you, "Am I forgiven?" "No." "Am I forgiven?" "No." "Am I forgiven?" No. You have to have time to really think about it.

When is it optional? Two things make forgiveness optional. One is if someone doesn't ask you for forgiveness, you're not obligated to forgive them. The second is if *somebody* has done you irrevocable hurt. The classic example given in the *Gemara*, in the Jerusalem *Talmud*, is if somebody has besmirched your name. Because that's understood to be irrevocable harm, because even if you reach the people who first heard about it, they won't necessarily reach the people to whom they've spoken. So, it's optional. Even in those instances, however, there are reasons why it might be wise to grant forgiveness. I can tell you a few reasons that come to my mind.

By the way, there is even a basis for it in *K'ri'at Sh'ma al haMita* — the *Sh'ma* we say before we go to sleep at night. I'm always surprised when speaking to a general Jewish audience, I'll ask people how many say the *Sh'ma* at night, and a fair number do. Most people literally will say that one line — *Sh'ma Yisrael* ... through *echad*. A few will add on the full paragraph.

Sometimes I'm surprised at people. I was once reading an interview with a prominent American journalist who said that he recited the *Sh'ma* every night — Mike Wallace — not somebody you would have normally thought would be doing it. But, Judaism has never been a zero-sum game. I sometimes wish that the rabbis had made a rule that when you add on a prayer, you have to subtract another prayer. So, we have a much longer prayer book than in the past. Need I talk about that to an audience that knows the prayer book far better than I do? But, you know, they didn't do it.

So if you now look in the *ArtScroll Siddur*, for example, the *Sh'ma* that you're supposed to say before you go to sleep at night is now eight pages, presumably for people who have trouble falling asleep, but not by the time they finish it.

One of the prayers you're supposed to say based on a teaching in the *Talmud*, is *Har'eini Mocheil* — I hereby forgive. It lists a whole series of people you forgive — people who insulted me, people who hurt me. By the way, interestingly, there's a pragmatic ethic in Judaism. You're supposed to forgive people who have caused you monetary damage, but you still have the right to sue them. In other words, you're not supposed to go around carrying around excessive anger.

That text, I suspect, is a *Kabbalistic* prayer, and I'll tell you why. There's one fascinating line in it that I've noticed even people who recite the prayer rarely realize is in there. Among the people you forgive are people who hurt you

*bein b'gilgul zeh, bein b'gilgul achein* — people who hurt you in this incarnation or in a previous incarnation.

There are two other reasons, both reflected in stories I heard from two rabbinic friends of why it's often wise to forgive even when you're not required to do so. One is something I heard from Harold Kushner, telling me of a case of a woman he knew in his congregation who had a horrible divorce. It happened ten years earlier, the husband had really treated her badly, had left in an improper manner, hadn't stayed in touch with the children — in short, this woman had a right to feel fully wronged by her husband.

What was bothersome to Kushner, though, was that, ten years later, her rage was totally unabated. She was as angry as if it had just happened. He said to her, "For ten years, you've been walking around with a hot poker in your hand, ready to throw it at your ex-husband, but you haven't. All that you've done is burn a hole in your hand." So that's another reason why it's worth forgiving.

Another was related by the scholar I mentioned earlier, Abraham Twersky. Twersky is an older man now who got his MD in the early '60s. Originally, his area of expertise as a psychiatrist has been addictive behavior. When he became a psychiatrist in the early '60s, addictive behavior most commonly referred to alcoholics. By the late sixties, it obviously was also referring to drug addicts, and today we know that the expression "addictive behavior" refers to a whole series of harmful behaviors in which one can engage.

The biggest problem among recovering alcoholics, obviously, is the temptation to go and drink, because when someone has an addiction, if they start drinking, more often than not it will quickly get out of hand. That's the issue with which recovering alcoholics struggle.

Twersky was once speaking to such a person and he said he had to analyze in himself when he was most likely to start drinking, because he desperately didn't want to drink. He noticed from his own experience that it was most likely to happen when he was angry at someone and the anger was consuming him. We all know that sort of anger. You get up in the middle of the night. You have to go to the bathroom and then you can't fall back asleep because you can't stop thinking about an injustice or somebody at whom you're angry.

So this man said to Rabbi Twersky, for his own protection, he had to learn to not carry grudges. And he then said something so brilliant that I repeat it to you because it applies to every single one of us in this room whether we have an issue with drinking or not. He said, "Carrying around grudges is like allowing the person in the world whom you most dislike to live in your mind rent-free."

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It's a brilliant observation. Our moods are very much determined by what's going on in our minds. I know that when I sit down and I'm learning a passage in the *Gemara*, and I'm really into it, I tend to be in a very good mood. I know that when I'm thinking about people at whom I'm angry, I tend to be in a bad mood.

We feed our mind like we feed our body. There are people who say, "I'll wait until I'm inspired to pray." But you know and I know that those people will almost never end up praying. We know that when you pray because you're supposed to pray, it ends up feeding the body. It feeds your faith. And carrying around grudges is like allowing a person in the world whom you most dislike to live in your mind rent-free.

There's another *chiddush* in Judaism. There are times where it's forbidden to forgive. When is that? You're forbidden to forgive an offense committed against somebody else. So, again, you'll say, so what's the *chiddush* in that? Why is that insightful? Because the prevailing notion in contemporary Christianity is that forgiveness, even in such instances, is appropriate.

I'll give you two examples. One is the Reverend John Miller who is a Methodist minister in Martha's Vineyard. He had a unique experience. He was informed in the summer of 1997 that President Clinton would be visiting his church. Obviously, a president can't drop in unannounced to a synagogue. That would create a lot of excitement. He also can't show up at a church unannounced. The Secret Service has to check out the facility.

So Miller was given an opportunity that very few clergy are given. He knew he was going to have the President of the United States in his church that Sunday. The President would have to listen to his sermon. There's no way a president's going to walk out during a sermon. There's no way a president's going to allow himself, no matter how tired, to fall asleep during a sermon. He had 15 minutes to say whatever he wanted to say to the President of the United States.

You can imagine that any minister, any priest, any rabbi is going to work very, very hard on that sermon. In theory, while there would be a few hundred people at the service, he'd be speaking to one person. So what did Miller choose to say, what did he choose to speak on? Forgiveness.

In the middle of his sermon, he held up a large photo of Timothy McVeigh, the man who bombed the Federal Building in Oklahoma in which 168 people were killed. He asked the congregation, "I invite you to look at Timothy McVeigh and forgive him. I have forgiven him. I ask you to do so. We, as Christians, are asked to do so."

Judaism would ask, why forgive Timothy McVeigh, a horrible, unrepentant killer, who, when asked if he felt bad about the two dozen children who were killed, said they were collateral damage?

I'll tell you another story. When I grew up, my high school principal in the Yeshiva of Flatbush was Dovid Eliach. His wife, Yaffa Eliach, got her doctorate in history and wrote a beautiful book called "Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust." Often, books of Chassidic tales have a very folkloristic or exaggerated element to them. Yaffa, being a historian, really tried to track down every detail and didn't put in stories unless she could find confirmation for them.

One of the stories she tells in that book is of a young Jewish couple who lived in a ghetto in Poland in 1942. They were getting reports that Jews were starting to be deported. They were getting terrible reports. They had no place to run to. It's not like they could go hide in the countryside. It was populated by Poles, who, unfortunately, by and large, were quite hostile to Jews. There were heroic figures, but the non-heroic figures outnumbered them.

The young couple was able to sneak out of the ghetto and find a Polish couple who had been old friends. They gave their two-year-old son to this couple, and said to them, "When we come back, please return him. If we don't return ..." and they then gave the couple two addresses — of a family in Montreal and a family in Washington D.C., *their mishpacha*. They said, "These people will adopt the child if we're killed."

The Polish couple were very devoted to the little boy. They took him with them to church every week. They raised him as their own child. By 1946, it becomes clear that the parents are not coming back. At that point, the Polish couple love this little boy. They go to their parish priest, and they say to him, "We want to adopt the child. We want you to baptize him." The priest says, "Tell me exactly what were the instructions of the parents." They're honest, and they tell him about the people in North America. The priest tells them, "Write to those two couples. If they don't want to adopt the child, I will baptize him and you will adopt him."

They write, and both families in America want to take the child. For immigration reasons, the boy first gets into Canada; then he ends up in Washington, D.C. The relatives always stay in touch with this Polish woman, who is quite poor and whose husband has since died. They send her money, but she never tells them this story until 1979, when they get a letter from her, in which, for the first time, she reveals what happened — that she wanted to convert him, and what the priest told her.

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She says in her letter, “Why am I telling you this story now? Because yesterday, that parish priest became Pope John Paul II.” It’s a remarkable story.

So, the second Christian figure who enunciated such a position concerning forgiveness was far better known — Pope John Paul II. I am a major admirer of John Paul II for a variety of reasons. He played an instrumental role in bringing down communism in Eastern Europe and he reached out to the Jewish community in a remarkable way. He went to pray at the synagogue in Rome. He went to the *Kotel* in Jerusalem, where he left a note asking forgiveness from the Jewish community. (What I’ve always found fascinating is I thought you weren’t supposed to read the notes that were put into the *Kotel*. I never found out how they got a hold of that one.) He established diplomatic relations with Israel.

Okay, now I feel I can say something critical about the Pope. On September 11, 2002, the first anniversary of 9/11, the Pope offered the following prayer: “We pray for the victims today. May they rest in peace and may God show mercy and forgiveness for the authors of this terrible attack.”

Again, why should God forgive these people who had no regret, whose only regret was probably that they struck at ten to nine in the morning and not ten to ten, when they would have killed far more people? But having said that, I must add: the more salient lesson for most of us is that the overwhelming majority of the time, we should forgive. We should let go of grievances. One thing I don’t envy people is people who can’t let go of grievances. As annoying as it is for anybody whose aggrieved them, they do not lead happy lives. So we’ve got to find ways to get rid of some of that anger.

How many people here wish you had better control over your tempers? How many people here are seated here next to someone who they wish had better control? I’ll give you one bit of advice on that subject, and it comes from having to work with myself on this issue. No matter how angry you get at another person, restrict the expression of your anger to the incident that provoked it. People often say terrible things when they’re angry at other people.

In how many of your families, at the level of first cousin or closer, are there people not on speaking terms? Look how common a phenomenon, a terrible phenomenon, it is, because people who know each other intimately are capable of really hurting each other in deep ways. So if you get angry at another person, no matter how angry you get, restrict the expression of your anger to the incident, and don’t start going into everything that person has done over the last 25 years that has angered you, and don’t use words like “always” and “never.” You know what I mean — “you’re always inconsiderate,” or “you never think before you act.” What’s the other person supposed to say? “You’re right. I am

always inconsiderate, I'm exceptionally stupid and I don't think before I act." So, avoid all such statements.

A second area I wanted to deal with came out of the subject of repentance. I had hundreds of note cards on repentance, and most of them fell into the obvious categories I knew I was going to write about. I was going to have a chapter on when to repent, how to repent, what things don't require repentance. Suddenly, I saw there were a lot of note cards on the subject of obstacles to repentance. What are the things that stop us from changing? What makes it hard to repent after we've done something wrong? It's actually painful even to think about it, so we don't want to face up to it. Shame ties in with that, so you don't want to do it. There's been a lapse of time — you don't want to devote more time to working on the change. There's fear of the consequences. Are you going to be able to change? All of these are valid considerations.

I'll give you some additional ones I put in, which lend themselves to a *Yom Kippur* sermon. What are some obstacles to change? One of them is blaming others. That trait is as old as humankind. The Bible teaches that God told Adam not to eat of the tree of the fruit of knowledge. Adam eats of it. God says, "Why did you eat of it?" What does Adam say? "Eve." God says to Eve, "Why did you do it?" "The snake." This sounds like a responsive reading in *shul*. The tendency to blame others is a terrible tendency.

I knew a young woman in her teenage years, who, whenever she was involved in anything bad, would blame someone else. I once said to her in great exasperation, "I am totally pessimistic about your future. You are the most unlucky human being I've ever met. Everybody you deal with is a bad person who inveigles you into something bad. Ironically, if you sometime acknowledged your fault, I would actually be optimistic about you, because if you caused the problem, you could un-cause the problem."

When people are finally willing to acknowledge the fault for the bad they've done, forgiveness is not only ethically right, it actually gives you reason for them to have hope that they can change. But if they are constantly blaming others — a very common tendency — for the problems that they are facing, then it's a primary way of avoiding having to deal with it themselves, and, of course, they're never going to improve.

I'll give you another example: saying that you were acting under duress; it really wasn't your fault. By the way, interestingly, there's a very unusual confession included in the *Al Cheit: Al cheit shechatahu l'fanekha b'ones uvratzon* — for the sin which we committed before you under duress — which is odd. What is "under duress?"

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I'm friendly with Uri Simon, a Bible scholar in Israel. He's a bit of an unusual character because he's a religious Jew. He's also more dovish than many in the religious community. He once said something very brilliant to me about one of the paradoxes of living in Israel. He said, the people who most believe we Jews are the Chosen People are the ones who are most apt to justify any policy Israel takes on the grounds that we have a right to act like any other nation. And the people who least believe that we're the Chosen People are the ones who are most apt to hold Israel to a standard that they don't hold any other nation. It's a wonderful paradox.

Uri inherited his ability to think in paradoxes from his father, an early disciple of Buber, with whom he stayed very close. Unlike most of Buber's circle, he became an observant Jew. He used to say, "My problem in life is that the people I can pray with, I can't talk to. And the people I can talk to, I can't pray with." He also said, "why do we say *al cheit shechatanu l'fanekha b'ones*? Why do we say, "for the sin I committed under duress?" If we truly did it under duress, we're not held responsible.

But the real reason is, we *say* we were under duress, but we weren't. We *say* we couldn't control our temper, but we could have. We *say* that we couldn't afford to be fully honest in that situation, but other people in that situation were.

Where do we find an example of someone claiming duress? Strangely enough, the Bible offers us an example: Aaron. Moses is up on Mt. Sinai, the people are building a Golden Calf. Moses comes down. He's furious, with a fury that's intensified when he finds out who built the Golden Calf: Aaron.

Aaron tries to disavow responsibility. He blames the people, which he technically had a basis for doing. But, what does he then say? If you look at the *pasuk*, he says, "They gave me their gold. *I told them* to give me their gold. They gave me their gold. I threw it into the fire, and out came a Golden Calf." He admits his role in making the idol.

One of the other subjects I wrote about is the tension between humility and self-esteem. How do we know that humility is such a virtue? If I handed out a piece of paper to everyone in this room and I asked you to write down what were the character traits of Moshe, I think many would say: he was courageous — he fought injustice — you'd be thinking of the episode when he stands up for the female shepherds of Midian against the male shepherds. He was compassionate — he prays for his sister Miriam even after he finds out Miriam has been speaking with Aaron in a not-nice manner about him.

But nowhere does the Bible ever say, "Moses was courageous. Moses fought injustice." We read these incidents and infer it. The only virtue the Bible

explicitly ascribes to Moshe is “*v'ha'ish Moshe anav m'od*” now this man Moses was very humble.” So we know right away it's an important virtue.

What is humility? Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. It's one of those plays on words that really works. You know, sometimes they're just really cute, but this one really does work.

Sometimes humility gets associated with a disparaging attitude towards oneself. Years ago when I worked at the Brandeis-Bardin Institute summer program, one of the people I worked with was David Tilman. Even though he was only 19 at the time, I knew he was going to be remarkable. He was a brilliant musician. I would often hear other kids compliment him and say how good something he had done was. He would say it was nothing.

I remember once saying to him, “Why do you deny that what you've done is good? First of all, it's insulting to the other people. They're complimenting you and you're throwing it back in their face. Secondly, they don't believe you. They know that what you did was good. So when you deny it, they think it's a false modesty, the sort of thing that gives humility a bad name.” So he said, “What should I say?” I said, “Whenever you're complimented, just say, ‘Thank you very much. That's very kind.’” Later, he told me that was the most worthwhile thing he learned from me that whole summer.

It's really an important thing to do. Who do I see as one model for this? *HaKadosh Barukh Hu* — God. If you look in the opening chapter of *B'reishit*, on six occasions, an expression occurs: *vayar elohim ki tov*, and God saw that it was good. God obviously had *nakhes* in the fact that something He did was good. It's not that God saw that it was good and then thought it really wasn't that good or started minimizing the accomplishment.

The most famous *pasuk* in the Torah is probably *v'ahavta l'rei'akha kamokha* — you should love your neighbor as yourself. So what's the explicit command? Love your neighbor. But there's an implicit command. Love yourself. I think it's an important implicit command. I wonder, has there been an abusive parent in history who had a good self-image? When are you apt to be kinder or more forgiving to others? When you're feeling good about yourself or when you're feeling not good about yourself?

There's a wonderful story they tell about the Chafetz Chayim, who is widely associated with the *mitzvah* of avoiding *lashon hara*, of not speaking ill of others. He popularized that cause. He lived a very long life, from 1838 to 1933, but he had become famous while still young. He lived in the late 19th century, the last time in human history that you could become famous without being commonly recognized, because photographs were not as common in those days.

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The Chafetz Chayim was once on a train going to a town to deliver a lecture. Sitting opposite him was a man who recognized from the way he was dressed that he was a religious Jew. The Chafetz Chayim asks the man where he's going. The man says, "I'm going into town to hear the Chafetz Chayim speak. He's the greatest rabbi in the world today, the biggest scholar, and the greatest saint."

Embarrassed, the Chafetz Chayim said to the man, "I know the Chafetz Chayim. He's not such a great scholar, and he's certainly not such a great saint." The man got so angry, he slapped the Chafetz Chayim in the face.

When they arrive in the town, the man goes to hear the speech, sees that the man giving the speech is the one whom he had slapped. Afterwards, he goes up. He says, "Rabbi, I had no idea it was you. Please forgive me."

The Chafetz Chayim says to the man, "Why should I forgive you? I have no reason to forgive you. It was my honor you were defending. You didn't do anything wrong. But I owe you a debt of gratitude because I learned an important lesson from you. For years, I've been teaching people, don't speak *lashon hara* about others. Now, I learned, don't speak *lashon hara* about yourself."

The notion that we learn from God about appreciating our own good is a very important one because we know that if people have low self-esteem, it makes them overly fearful. In *BaMidbar*, chapter 12, the phrase *ha'ish Moshe anav m'od* — this man Moses was very humble — recurs. Yet with all that humility, he goes to Pharaoh, and says, *shalach et ami*. He stands up to the tyrant of his age and says, "let my people go."

One chapter later we learn the story of the Israelite spies in Canaan. What's their issue? They come back and report, there's no way we can defeat those people.

This after they've seen all of God's miracles in the Wilderness. Why can't we defeat them? "We look like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we appear to them." If you yourself see yourself as a grasshopper, nobody else is going to be very impressed with you. That's why it's important.

As Rabbi Twersky writes in one of his books, "How can you tell if what's involved in an issue is low self-esteem or humility?" He says, "Low self-esteem demoralizes, humility inspires. Humility makes you think, this is what God would want me to do. Low self-esteem demoralizes and makes you feel that it's very hard." Therefore, never confuse humility with low self-esteem.

Chaim Volozhen, who was a student of the Ga'on of Vilna, said, "A man who has no outstanding qualities or achievements cannot be considered a humble person even if he humbles himself, because he really doesn't have anything to be proud of."

Winston Churchill had a political opponent whom he really didn't like, but people said to him, at least acknowledge he's a modest man. So Churchill said, "You're right. He's a modest man. He has a lot to be modest about."

Yeruchem Levovitch was the *mashgiach ruchani*—the spiritual counselor—at the Mir Yeshiva. He made a very interesting point: "It is important for people to know their weaknesses," and I agree with him. I find that the older I get, the people I least enjoy dealing with are people who don't know their own weaknesses. You can't talk to them without their becoming defensive. They don't know how to work on themselves. Not knowing yourself and your weaknesses can account for the phenomenon that a person can be 70 years old and still be immature. But he made another point: "It's even more important that people know their strengths, because those strengths are ultimately what are going to enable them to overcome those weaknesses."

It's one of the sad aspects of American life that we always put such emphasis on weaknesses because, ultimately, people need to know their strengths. Otherwise, they will be overcome and disabled if they're made too aware, repeatedly, of just what their weaknesses are. So that's what I'm setting out to do. I want there to be a return to an understanding of what Hillel taught us about Judaism. If, in fact, Jewish religiosity always gets so defined by ritual issues, we are going to be very limited in what we can teach the world, because that's not ultimately where we have the most innovative and important things to teach the world.

Some of the things that grew out of Jewish rituals have been world-transforming. Monotheism has been one of them. The Sabbath has been one of them. Jews brought into the world the notion of a universal God. Jews brought to the world the idea of the Sabbath, an idea that has probably changed human history more than almost any other idea.

Do you know that in 1892, the workers at the Homestead Steel Mine which was owned by Andrew Carnegie, the greatest philanthropist of his age, were working seven days a week, 12 hours a day? They were given off Christmas and July 4<sup>th</sup>. Yet the Bible, some 3000 years ago (the most radical Biblical critics say 2500 years ago), by telling us to take one day a week off, says that human beings have value, even when they're not producing.

Avoiding *lashon hara*—speaking unfairly about others—stands right up there with Monotheism and the Sabbath among concepts that Jews have taught the world. One of the reporters at MSNBC, David Gregory, always knew he was Jewish and he always had pride in it, but recently he has started studying Judaism seriously. When he was asked to comment on television about Tim Russert's death he said, "The *Talmud* teaches that when a person dies, the first

question he's asked when he comes before the heavenly court is 'Did you conduct your business affairs honestly?'" He continued, "Tim Russert was the sort of person who could answer that question affirmatively."

A woman I know who's not an observant Jew saw that and said she was deeply moved, because this was a Jewish teaching brought before the world. We are all the emissaries of the Jews, every single person in this room. I'm saying it not in just a general sense, but exactly because of the work you do. You, I, all of us who work within the Jewish community as religious figures represent Judaism to the world.

But, if we're only associated with the rituals of Judaism, it's not enough. I emphasized at the beginning how important I think those rituals are. When Hillel is asked that question, he says, "What's hateful unto you, don't do unto your neighbor. The rest is commentary." I want to start finding those texts that can give us what that commentary is, that can give us insights into how to conduct our affairs on a daily basis in a way that we become a blessing to fulfill God's blessing to Abraham — that we become a blessing not only for the world, but a blessing in our own lives. That, really, will be the fulfillment in our life of Hillel's answer. Thank you very much.

## Chaplaincy Track

Hazzan Steven Stoehr

It's not often my privilege to present something so serious to a group of people who could do as good of a job as I hope to present to you. It will begin with a little guided imagery, and when we return from that imagery, we're going to talk. So I ask for your trust, and if this isn't something you're comfortable with, then please just sit quietly. This isn't the spirituality class, this is part of the chaplaincy experience. By getting in touch with exactly who you are, you will be more able to help other people get in touch with who they are.

So take a nice deep breath and close your eyes if you're comfortable to do so. Although we're all together, we're each going to find a small personal place where we feel safe and take a leap of hope. Find a comfortable position; cross or uncross your legs as you desire; take another deep breath and listen to the sound of that breath; and it should feel very, very good. Your breathing is calm, like a white light which is ridding your body of fear and anxiousness, because every breath you take is life. Relax the muscles in your face; relax your shoulders and your arms; your breathing is very easy: fresh and tranquil. Listen to the quietness around you; more importantly, inside of you, and take one more slow, deep breath and we will begin our journey.

You are about to meet with someone you wish to remember. There may be several people, but I ask to choose one person who no longer walks the path of life with you. It may be someone for whom you are named; it may be your parent; an aunt you knew for a few years of your young life; a victim of the *Shoah* whose name you never knew, yet whose face is emblazoned in your mind. It could be that old man you remember from the synagogue or that Yiddish-speaking neighbor from your neighborhood.

Bring their face into your mind and see it ever so clearly. Bring yourself to that place that you remember them most vividly. Maybe a home, maybe an apartment, wherever it is, you see them. You're very close to that place now. You're standing outside its entrance. When were you there last? Do you remember who you were when you were there? It may have been recently, or very long ago, but let go of the anxiety you feel because this is going to be a good visit.

Open the door, walk in; if it's outside, walk closer. Is it bright? What's the temperature? The distinct smell of that place is returning to you. You're moving toward the one room where you can see that person. It's not a photograph, it is that person — alive. You've entered one of the hallways you need to walk through to get to that room where they're sitting. Prepare yourself

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to see them, and walk in, It's so good to see them again!

They look up as they sense you standing there. They smile and their eyes twinkle with delight. They take a refreshing breath of joy in having you there with them again. Go ahead and touch their hand and feel the warmth. If you wish, take that hug for which you have been waiting for so long.

What are they wearing? Is that familiar fragrance still upon them? And now, you're going to be able to speak with them face to face, not just in your mind; and share some of the things that remain in your heart.

Allow me to begin the question and you complete it for yourselves as appropriate. "You know, I've always wanted to tell you ..." "I know I promised to remember, but I forgot, and I'm sorry." "I wish I had told you before you died, that ..." "If you need to know that your life mattered to me, then you need to know ..." "What more can I do with my life to honor your life?"

Our time is running short and we must begin to say goodbye, so if you can, tell them that you love them and give them a hug and a kiss. If you can't say the words, "I love you;" if you never heard those words from them, you don't need to say it; but simply take a moment, look in their eyes and whisper to them, "Yes, I know; I've always known."

You're going to need to go now. You have to let go of them. But believe that you will always hold onto them; you will always be able to recall this melting into one another; your chest pressed upon theirs; your arms embracing their whole being, and their touch as comforting as it was when you were younger. Look deep into their eyes one last time and begin to turn and walk away. Walk out the door of that room and turn around and just wave gently goodbye; maybe even blow them a kiss. Continue down the hall or the stairs into the entryway, and there you see a *yahrtzeit* candle. Stop and light it. Say a prayer and promise to remember.

Take another deep breath. It's calm, it's peaceful and it fills your chest with life, with hope and with goodness. It's time to return. When you're ready, take another moment. Slowly open your eyes and feel only wholeness and the warmth of their love.

Thank you for trusting me for those few moments. The imagery that I read from was crafted by Rabbi Irwin Kula and me. He gave me the premise and I went ahead and ran with it, so I'd like to give credit to our friend, Rabbi Kula.

When we talk about death, none of us are all that sure. A lot of us have faith; we have ideas, but there is no proof for life after death. There is proof of life and there is proof of death; but life after death, the wisdom about that still eludes us. So we had the chance just now to say goodbye to somebody who had already gone, but how do we say goodbye to somebody who is still living?

I'm not a pastoral psychiatrist. I have no advanced degrees beyond any of you, and I guarantee you, you have more degrees than I do. But I've had some 20 years of experience and 47 years of life, and I've learned some things. That's all I'm here to do: to share with you some of the things I've learned.

Our goal when someone is about to die is to help them deal with reality without ever stealing their hope. One of the greatest gifts a person has is that sense of hope, and we're never meant to steal it.

I once read a book about the *chevrah kadishah* in London and *bikkur cholim*. We are taught that *bikkur cholim* alleviates 1/60<sup>th</sup> of someone's illness, so on the third day of someone's illness in the hospital, the *chevrah kadishah*, as a gesture of *bikkur cholim*, would come and visit, so that one day, should they need to come and visit for their ultimate purpose, they wouldn't scare the person. People always knew that the *chevrah kadishah* was coming on the third day because you never wanted to steal somebody's sense of hope by your presence. I hope that our presence in a hospital room, in a hospice, in someone's home where a person is about to die, gives them a sense of hope. We have to help the individual. We have to help the families.

I created several pamphlets for my congregation that I have found to be helpful. The first one is called "Kaddish, A Tribute Beyond the Sands of Time." I asked synagogue members to write their own testimonials, saying: "I came to *shul* for 11 months, and this is how it changed me." So, it's congregants talking to congregants about the *mitzvah* of saying *Kaddish*. I don't know what happens in your synagogues, I know that in ours, we read the *yahrtzeit* list every day. But people aren't coming to observe *yahrtzeit*, people aren't coming to say *Kaddish*, and *shivah* doesn't mean *shivah* anymore. Rather than have the rabbis or me preach to them, we had *amkha* talk to *amkha*. It's one idea about having the family continue the idea of remembrance and connectedness to someone who is dying, through *Kaddish*.

The second pamphlet, "Turning the Key of Time," is a ceremony which I borrowed, with permission, from Rabbi Richard Hirsh of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. It's a ceremony that helps a person close up the apartment or house of people they loved and make a ritual out of it. There's a *genizah* box, and a *yahrtzeit* candle at the door. You say a prayer before you leave, you ask for forgiveness for anything you may have done wrong within that home. It takes the mundane and creates the sacred from it.

That's our task. It's all great to sing songs. It's all great to lead prayer. But our task is to elevate the spirituality of our congregation members even in the most difficult of situations. I've done that for my congregation and am happy to make that available to you.

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The third pamphlet I created is called “Farewell and Shalom.” Often the Rabbi or I are in the home of an individual on Hospice care who’s about to die, or in a hospital where someone would be pronounced dead in a short time. You can see the numbers on the monitors fluctuate, as if the numerical gods are going up and down, and family members worshiping those numbers, as it were, hoping that they stay steady, but knowing that fate is going to take its turn. People say “What do I say? What do we do?” Certainly we have the *Viddui*, that’s a given, which is included in this booklet. But what do you say once someone has died? You’ve called the funeral chapel they’re on their way. They come in the room and ask the family to walk out for a few minutes as they move the person onto the transport bed or gurney and this person is being taken out for the last time that you are physically going to be in their presence. How do you say goodbye? What do you say? Besides words from your heart, I’ve come up with a series of small quotations, based on liturgy and *TaNaKh* to help them through that moment. Again, it’s not only about helping that individual find peace at their moment of saying goodbye, it’s helping the family as well.

Bob Scherr and others who are chaplaincy experts can speak to it better than I, but as a person is dying, they often feel alone — and they feel lonely. Those are two very different feelings, and our goal is to try to attend to both. Sometimes they are alone. They’re in the hospital, it’s early in the morning and they’re alone. But the feeling that they’re *lonely* is so very sad. That’s when they need your presence, they need their family’s presence, they need to feel the *Sh’khinah* as much as you can help them feel that.

Depending on the process of their dying, their attitude is going to be very different. Some people have come to terms with it. Some people aren’t aware of it — it’s an accident and they’re almost comatose and there’s not much you can say to them. However, science has shown — based on brain waves and monitors and so forth — that the sense of hearing is really very crisp, far beyond the other senses. So I always implore the families to *talk* to the dying.

My father was in a terrible situation about a year-and-a-half ago and had an emergency surgery. He would be in the ICU for months, but right after the surgery, we went into the room. You’ve all seen it, tubes everywhere and a life that just doesn’t remind you of the life you so cherished. I decided to put my iPod on my dad’s head and play some music including hazzanut and Yiddish. My dad is Judaically absorbed, and every time Chaim Frenkel’s recording came on, my dad’s toe would tap. Only Chaim Frenkel, not even me! Now, every time I hear some of Chaim’s music, it just warms me. So while we didn’t think my dad was cognizant of the things we were saying, that *B’rosh Hashanah*, or whatever other gorgeous songs Chaim offers, my dad responded.

Talk to the person. They may be angry, they may be upset and they may feel that life is futile, and in certain medical ways it is. Nevertheless, talk to them.

We talk about the distinction between people. Some people wake up and say “Good morning, God,” and others say “Good God, it’s morning,” depending on their sense of health and stability of mind. You could meet either of those two people (although it’s the same person) when you come into a room to visit with them. Their words, if you can get them to open up, will belie their emotions. Our greatest talent is to listen.

The same is true with *shivah* visits. You go in and you listen. It’s about their healing, not your need to visit, or your need to be helpful. I’m struck by the lack of coincidence that the words “listen” and “silent” are spelled with the same letters. So, just be quiet. Maybe it’s a little *Kabbalistic* or it’s a little peculiar, but when I walk into the room, I don’t walk in with my arm out in front of me. It’s confrontational, sometimes, to be reached at. We’re always taught that with dogs, you don’t reach out to pet them on the head because it might spook them.

Someone lying in such a vulnerable state in a hospital bed isn’t always aware. The doctors come in and they put their stethoscopes in there ... so I always walk in with my arms palms-up to form the letter *shin* and say: “How are you?” It’s very open. I feel very vulnerable. If you study a little bit of *Kabbalah*, you’ll find that this position was a historically prominent position in Jewish prayer, one associated with Chassidic fervor. The posture of the letter *shin* stands for *Shem*, the Name of God. You are there as a partner with God. You are there doing God’s work here on earth to bring these people a sense of spirituality.

I take all of that with me before I go into the room. You know the phrase “God was in this place and I did not know it?” In a moment such as that, you know it. You know that you’re not in there alone, that you’re in there doing some sacred work. And so for me, at least, I know walking in with this posture, I feel as if my Partner is standing there with me.

Listen to what someone is saying. Families have started to put such great importance on final words. “What was the last thing my dad said to me?” “What was the last thing I said?” “What was the last offering of this person?” We feel that somehow as people come closer to death, all of a sudden they become imbued with a sense of prophecy or a sense of wisdom they might not have ordinarily. Perhaps Grandma’s last words were “buy Costco,” or whatever. Grandma must have had a vision, so now I’m going out to buy Costco.

There’s a recent book called “The Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch, a professor at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. This gentleman was

suffering with a terminal illness and gave his last lecture on what he would say to his students. He was on the TV circuit and now the book is out.

There is a mystique about someone's final days, coming to the end of life as we know it, at least the life we can prove. It's important to listen to what it is they want to say. Yet, when you walk into the room, they want to know what *you* have to say, they're looking for something from you. "Cantor, it's so nice that you took the time to come" which feels so unnecessary. It's almost a *z'khut* to be in the presence of someone who is at such a spiritual high at that moment. They're so pure, they're so unconcerned with their physical and material beings and they're just concerned about what's going to be. How can I know that things will be okay? They're not looking for religion, they're looking for spirituality. They're looking for a sense of wholeness.

So what *do* you say? What *don't* you say? I think the most important thing is to talk to them about *them*, about their lives, their personal narratives, to let them know that their life mattered, that it made a difference and that there is some sense of permanence. And if you can, in some way, try to empower them. They feel so vulnerable, they feel as if everything is being done to them, and yet they're an adult.

Let's take that scenario. They're an adult, they've done pretty darn well over a lifetime of decision making and now they're not being asked. The family's being asked, the doctor's being asked. Oftentimes we forget to ask *them* what they want. So talk to them, empower them, validate their lives and let them know that they have their independence — as dwindling as it may be — for as long as they can keep it.

I try to speak to people about death not being the consummation of time alone, even though I have no prooftext which speaks to the continuance of time. There is an element of faith there. Review the whole of their life. Talk about their childhood, their middle age, their adulthood, their children and let them know that they are part of eternity, that Abraham and Sarah were thinking about "when I die, what might be?"

Well, we are what might be. As Rabbi Telushkin mentioned, George Washington in his day and age lived and said "Someday in the future ..." We're part of that future. We need to think that there is a future beyond us — our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren. We are less than we believe we are because we're only a minuscule part of the whole of eternity, and yet, we're remarkably important because we are a link in that chain of eternity. To affirm this person's worth in life is a great gift that you can give them.

People don't want to feel that their life wasn't valuable. *Kol ha'olam kulo, gesher tsar m'od*. The world's a narrow bridge. The whole world is a bridge from

one world to another; from before we were born to now, from where we are now to somewhere else. *V'haikar lo l'facheid k'lal*. The question is, how do you do that second part? How do you not be afraid?

“Despair” is made up of two Latin words which mean “without hope.” How does someone look at the end of their life, realizing that medically things are coming to an end, and not find despair? How do they retain a sense of hope? I think the idea is not to try and convince them that the inevitable is irreversible, just to be very honest with them. People don’t want to be lied to. You have to confront them with the reality of death and the finality of physical existence. But a physical death is less traumatic than an emotional death or death in memory. Just as we continue to think about Benjamin Franklin and all the historic figures before us, so too, will the people you are visiting be thought of, appreciated and cherished for years to come.

That is a very reassuring thought, and I think we take it too much for granted. We all hope our families will think of us, but I’m not sure that people are *assured* of it, so the more they can hear it from people they trust and love, such as ourselves, the more comforted they are.

There is a 100% chance that all of us will die, so it’s not something that, as adults, is a shock to us. The dying know it. We pray for a long life and a valuable life, but they’re not looking for you to change the inevitable. They’re looking for you to help bring them a sense of comfort and understanding. Each and every day we get a new chance at life: *shehechezarta bi nishmati b’chemlah rabbah emunatekha* — “each and every day, God, You return my soul to me.” Each and every day is a new opportunity for living this life. There’s a potential that one day our soul will not be returned to us. We understand that. The important thing is to live a life that matters.

Many of us know the poem “The Dash” by Linda Ellis which refers to the dash on a tombstone. It’s a beautiful poem which has been made into a picture book and a movie. It says:

#### **The Dash**

I read of a man who stood to speak  
at the funeral of a friend.

He referred to the dates on her tombstone  
from the beginning ... to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth  
and spoke of the following date with tears,  
but he said what mattered most of all  
was the dash between those years.

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For that dash represents all the time  
that she spent alive on earth ...  
and now only those who loved her  
know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;  
the cars ... the house ... the cash.  
What matters is how we live and love  
and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard ...  
are there things you'd like to change?  
For you never know how much time is left  
that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough  
to consider what's true and real,  
and always try to understand  
the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,  
and show appreciation more  
and love the people in our lives  
like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,  
and more often wear a smile ...  
remembering that this special dash  
might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read  
with your life's actions to rehash ...  
would you be proud of the things they  
say about how you spend your dash?

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The idea is to use each day as an additional blessing, an opportunity to live. In the time that you have visiting this individual, you have to reassure them that their dash has been spent nobly. I think that's the greatest gift that you can give to them.

We don't know what life was like before we were conceived — or perhaps even before we were two or three years old. There's a wonderful song and a *midrash* that talks about two twins in the womb, sitting and arguing with each other. One brother is a pessimist and says: "This is it, we live in a little,

dark, cramped space with no windows, no room with a view; this is it, we're done." The other brother says: "No, no, I believe there is a world to come; there's going to be more, there's going to be better, so, let's not despair, let's have hope." And they go back and forth. All of a sudden, one of the twins disappears, and the brother that remains says, "Oh my God, my brother's gone, he's dead. That was it. I knew it. I knew it!" Then you hear the second voice saying: "Brother, I've just been born into a new world and you're going to come and be with me soon." Just as we don't know what awaits us when we're in the womb, so too, this world is a womb for a world to come. We have to try to prepare ourselves for that. The Book of Genesis says: *vayamot ... vayei'aseif el amo* — when someone dies, they are gathered in to their people.

I like to tell people, "Yes, your soul will live on in some eternal realm with your grandfather, your grandmother, the neighbors and everyone who ever lived through all of history, and you'll be welcomed into the embrace of heaven. But you will also be gathered into *your* people, *your* family. You're going to be gathered into their hearts, their stories, their minds and the legacy of your life." Just talk to them about permanence and the fact that their life matters tremendously.

It doesn't always make sense. You're going to get the Kushnerian questions "Why, why me? Why, why, why?" Now, remember, Kushner doesn't ask *that* question! It's not "Why do bad things happen?" It's "When bad things happen, what do you do? How do you deal with it?" The answer is to live a life that matters. Trying to make sense of life doesn't always make sense.

I read something that talks about this world as a needlepoint. If you look at it from the top, it's a beautiful picture of something, and if you turn it over and you look at it from the bottom, it's a *balagan*, it makes no sense. There's no form, there's no structure. We're taught, that's what this world is. We're living on the underside of God's tapestry. From here, it doesn't make any sense when that two-year-old dies, or that forty-year-old dies in a car crash on the way to work, or any of the other numerous disasters we can talk about. But from God's viewpoint, the picture looks the way it's supposed to look.

It's very difficult to say we can't question God or that God intends this for some reason or another. I don't want to turn this into a theology class on free will and God's predetermination of the world. But I'm suggesting that in your own minds it will be useful to use the concept of us looking at the world as a tapestry. Maybe we're looking at the reverse side of it and we can't quite understand what God intended. Just as Job in the Bible suffered travail and issues of faith and never really got a lot of answers to his suffering, there is a natural order in the world and maybe there's a moral order too, upon which we

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just don't have a grasp.

What is our expertise as hazzanim that *we* can bring, besides just being wonderful soulful, sweet people? To narrow it down to one thing, let's say *prayer*. Rabbi Artson offered that we are the liturgists of expertise. Rabbi Telushkin, in his presentation, spoke about the prayer book and said, "You as hazzanim know it better than I do." That's great! We'll take that label as the liturgical experts. Max Wohlberg used to sign his books, placing them in his library, with the words: "*Moshe Wohlberg, Shatz, Mats.*" *Shaliach Tsibbur, Moreh Tsedek* — messenger of the people, righteous teacher. So we're "*Matses*." Our expertise is prayer.

What can we help these people pray for? It often feels very Christian to say, "Let's hold hands and pray." As Jews we don't do that sort of thing (maybe on the West coast). We're not as comfortable as the Christian community doing that sort of thing. I've heard people much smarter than I lecture about the idea of *love*, to talk about God's love of you. It doesn't sound very Jewish, except that we say it all the time — *Ahavah rabbah ahavtanu* and *Ahavat olam beit yisrael, amkha ahavta* — God loves us all the time. We also say that *V'ahavta l'rei'akha kamokha* — loving one's neighbor as oneself — is a fundamental principle in the Torah. In English it doesn't sound so Jewish, but it is. We have to try to get across to them that somehow God *does* love them and that *we* do love them.

We can't pray for something that's already in motion. You can't say "I pray that my cancer will go away." It's here, it's going to take its course. There is a *Talmudic* teaching that says if you hear a fire engine drive by you, you can't pray that it's not your house, because: a) it's already in motion; and b) you can't pray that it's somebody else's house.

Rabbi Telushkin told us a couple of years ago that he recites a *b'rakha* every time he hears a fire engine or a siren. When you're stuck in traffic and all of a sudden you have to pull over because there's a siren coming, he says rather than getting annoyed, say a *b'rakha*, "May they get there in time." "May the person be safe." We can think outside of our annoyances and ourselves, but we can't help this person pray for something that's already occurring.

Some people pray for death. As Jews, we're not allowed to hasten death, but we don't have to elongate someone's suffering. Some people pray for peace of mind. We all know the excerpt from Serenity Prayer, used by Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-Step groups, which is taken from the writings of Reinhold Neibuhr, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference." The idea is: take one day at a time. Let's get through today. Let's try to give you a good day free of pain, a day of good feelings and a sense of security and assurance of love, because each day can be *ham'chadeish b'tuvo b'khol*

*yom tamid ma'asei v'reishit* — a new opportunity to live life. So, yes, yesterday was bad and tomorrow might be terrible, but today is a good day. So pray with them to appreciate the moment and the beauty of the day.

Pray for strength, pray for time, and if they say “I don’t know how to pray,” somewhere in the *Talmud*, probably *masechet b'rakhot*, it says “Pray in any language that you know.” I think all of us would tell them that. You don’t have to use the words of the *siddur* or of tradition. Create your own tradition at a moment such as that.

How else do we help them cope, within the realm of our role as Jewish leaders? I think we have to try to help them understand God a little bit. My personal philosophy is that God is a co-mourner at the time of someone’s death. We are all created *b'tselem elohim* — in God’s image. I think if God is *hayah, hoveh, v'yih'yeh* (eternal) and some part of each of us is God-like, I believe that *tselem elohim* is that eternal element. We have always been and we will always be, whether that’s our *n'shamah*, our *nefesh*, our soul or our electrons that escape our body when we die. I believe that we are, in some manner, eternal. God wishes that for us and mourns for us when we suffer.

Many of you know that I administer the *chevrah kadishah* of my community. I’ve found that there’s a very marked difference between the two seconds before someone dies and the two seconds after someone dies. Those of you in chaplaincy, I’m sure, can attest to that. It’s just different. It’s no longer that person. Something’s gone — that spiritual element of *nefesh*, of soul, that God has planted into us. *V'chayei olam nata b'tokheinu* — God has implanted within us an eternal sense of life. I try to speak to them about that concept. God had gone through *tsimtsum*, a sense of retraction, to make room for Creation. Each time a person is born, a little piece of God gets put within them. And when someone dies, it returns again to God.

There’s a quote that says: “*umei'az yatsa matok*” — “from the strong came something sweet.” Do you remember Samson’s riddle from the Book of Judges? Bees had inhabited the carcass of a lion that he had killed in self-defense and that is where they were now producing honey. From something difficult can come something pleasing. In the vernacular, we call it finding the silver lining. You’ve got to find something that validates all of the suffering that’s going on. Medical science will benefit from it, your family will become closer because of this terrible moment in your life. For them, seeing *your* strength will give *them* strength. You’re developing character with them. You’re going to hear things and have opportunities to express love that you’ve never had the chance to express before. Find some sense of *matok* even in this remarkably difficult moment for them, because what happens to you is less important than your response to it.

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How you respond is everlasting.

Even in this terrible, sad moment we can't dwell on the heavy. Enough people are going to be doing that for the person, you're there to bring a smile to their face and a hug. The very first humans, Adam and Eve, are banished from the garden of Eden which was the most glorious place ever created. What do they do? They conceive a child. They have just been told they will no longer have a perfect life, the ground will no longer bring bread forth, they're doomed to die and she's going to have labor pains. But in the face of this terrible sadness they bring life into the world. They bring forth the *matok* out of the difficult. We can help change some of the experience of a person who is dying but we certainly can't change it all. That is where the Serenity Prayer comes in.

Help them to arrive at decisions that make a difference. The concept of ethical wills is something I like to teach to congregational members. We all leave wills. My kids know that one of them gets my watch, one of them gets the ring and they all think they'll get my good looks. But the ethics that you live with — how will my 13-year-old know the essence of who I really am if I should die soon? These ethical wills are a way to transfer the deepest beliefs in your life to your family. If someone hasn't done it by the time they're in this terrible condition, at least encourage them to do it verbally. It could be difficult or foreign to them. It's not a natural conversation. But dying isn't part of our natural daily activity either. Try to encourage them not to leave anything unsaid. One of the most beautiful things any of us could hear at a funeral would be if a son or a daughter or a spouse or a sibling got up and stated: "I said everything I had to say to Dad before he died and he shared his deepest thoughts with me." Because the woulda, coulda, shouldas can drive you crazy. It's a shame that it comes to a final moment like this before we all realize that "Ach, I should have said it." That's why now and again we might do well to slap ourselves in the face and say, "Enjoy the day, enjoy life, don't get caught up in the *m'shugaas*."

When you walk into that room to help that person, even though it might be too late to jot things down and although it won't be legally binding, allow them to get out what's been weighing so heavily on their mind. As I said earlier, our personal narrative defines who we are, where we came from, who we are and where we had hoped to go. An author talks about not being held hostage to the tyranny of a dream. We have certain dreams in our life. I hope to live to be 90 years old and to be shot dead by a jealous husband. That's how I want to go. We all want to accrue some material comforts, we all have dreams. We want to be married and happy, or not be married and be happier.

Whatever our choices are, we all have dreams. Sometimes those dreams go phffft! What, then, do you do? Do you sulk, do you say, "God, I always

thought I was going to be ...?" Don't be held hostage to that dream. Dream again! Life is too short. Go to sleep and dream again. Set another dream. Cut your losses. Learn from it, but don't be held hostage to the dream that you had. Just let go. Your kids are going to get married, and your grandchildren will grow and be well. The world will be all good. We should try to help the dying let go of some of that. "I thought ..., I wish ..., I could have ..., I should have ..., I didn't do enough." Help them find peace in the sense of what they have accomplished.

Death, in some references in Jewish literature, is called *she'ol*, which is spelled with the three letters: *Shin, Aleph, Lamed*. What's the root then? *Sha'al*—Ask. There are lots of questions about death. We don't know what hell is, we don't know what death is. All we can do is to continue to explore, to think and to ponder what it is. As I said, we don't have all those answers. But we shouldn't be afraid to tell the person who is dying: "I stand before you, vulnerable, letting you know I don't have all the answers."

If you're not afraid to engage in that dialogue with someone who is dying, that makes you a very special person because most people are very afraid of engaging people. People are afraid of engaging old people. People are afraid of engaging sick people. It's tough to do, but you *can* walk into that room and ask: "How are you?" And they say: "I feel like ...," and you respond: "That's okay, we're going to spend some time together." Just walk in there, open and vulnerable. Let your countenance, guided by God's presence, bring you into that room, because, as the Haftarah says, *nachamu, nachamu* — "comfort, truly comfort." There are two sources of comfort. One is from us and the other is from God. We're here to perform the task of trying to comfort people at a terrible time.

I learned another little thing from *Kabbalah*. It talks about trying to understand life as the journey of the *soul*, not the way we human beings measure life, which is by flesh and bone. We may talk about a two-year-old, a nine-year-old, a 15-year-old, a 40-year-old, a 100-year-old — that's a 100-year-old being and body, but the *Kabbalistic* teaching talks about *nefesh*, the soul, and how the soul, in order to attain its eternal place of rest, has to climb the ten *sfirot*. It has to get to all ten, but sometimes a soul has only gotten to two or three. So in the next life (recalling Rabbi Telushkin's teaching about the concept of reincarnation) maybe the soul gets five more *mitzvah* points, and it can go to the tenth *sfirah*, and then the next time, to the final goal. So maybe when a young child or young person dies, maybe the soul only needed one more step to get to its ultimate eternal rest. While it's sad for us as human beings to see that this young child, this young being, only lived a short life, if we think outside of ourselves in a more

spiritual manner maybe it's like in that Jimmie Stewart movie "It's a Wonderful Life," where the bell rings and Clarence gets his wings.

There are various disciplines that help us try to address the idea of death. Proof of the afterlife is tough to address with any sense of definitiveness.

As I mentioned earlier, I've done some work with the *chevrah kadishah* I established in my congregation. We've done about 50 burial preparations so far. I go to every one, male or female, although I do not walk into the room for a female. My son has done them with us, my wife has done them for us. I'm not saying it's a family activity, but it is something you don't have to be a medical professional to engage in. I believe it's the single, most important thing I do. When people come up to me and say "Steve, you've been President of the CA, you're a remarkable talent, you do all these remarkable things, what's the most rewarding part of your career?" I say "Death," because I know I've made a difference somewhere. If I don't show up to the wedding, the bride and the groom are going to have *yichud*, they're going to be thrilled. If I don't go to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the kid's got the checks coming, the family's got the *Kiddush* and they're happy as the dickens. But if I don't walk into a funeral, if I don't take care of someone and place them in *tachrichim*, if I don't walk into that hospital room and share a moment of solace and comfort with someone, perhaps things aren't going to be as peaceful. So, the *chevrah kadishah* is a big part of my life, as are *shivah minyanim*.

We undertook a project with the Federation of Jewish Men's clubs to do creative services, and I took on *shivah minyanim*. It wasn't so much a creative service as it was an attempt to create a model for conducting a *shivah minyan*. You'd be surprised at some of the terrible ways people try to conduct these *minyanim*. You don't conduct a *shivah minyan* the same way you conduct *Mincha/Ma'ariv* at *shul*. There's a whole other gestalt and you're all probably sensitive enough to know it, but if you're looking for some sort of teaching pamphlet, or educational program to help teach your congregations how to lead *shivah minyanim*, I've created something for that and I'd be happy to make it available to you.

When I meet the people with whom I visit in dire situations, I don't bring note cards with me, I just have the ideas in my mind. But when I teach death to USYers or adults or talk to kids, I use a lot of specific quotes. I hand them out and ask what people think that quote has to do with death and dying. In these next few minutes, let's do a little bit of interaction and see what you come up with to interpret what these cards that were handed out may mean.

One which I spoke about earlier says, "Do not be held hostage to your dreams." Sometimes life offers you things that don't quite go your way — what

do you do about them? Rav Kook says, "God is wherever you let God in." Someone suggested that means being open to possibility. God isn't "space" to find, even though we say *hamakom y'nacheim etkhem* — may The Place comfort you — but it's not always a *makom*, it's *each and every* place God is, in that moment.

Leon Wiseltier writes in his book, *Kaddish*, "The synagogue is not intended to be a religious experience ... it's meant to be an experience of religion." If you want it to be a religious experience, that's up to you. That quote is not so much for the dying as it is for the people coming to say *Kaddish*. They say "I came in and it didn't really do anything for me." The buffet is there — serve yourself. It's the whole instant gratification thing. These days, many Jews come to *shul* and want to know what you can do for them. They don't realize that they have to do some work of their own. They just want to be gratified, and if they feel they're not getting it, then it's useless.

I think we have to begin by making a religious experience for ourselves. If we do that it's going to radiate outward to our congregations. We might plan a few tricks, we might plan a few special tunes, but how we come across will be completely determined by how we prepare ourselves before we step up to the *bimah*, to God. When we're in that sacred space, we'll also draw the dying person into that space. I think that sometimes we give a little too much emphasis on the importance of place and don't realize how much has to go *into it* to make it meaningful.

I saw a cartoon that shows a clergy person standing right outside the front door of a church or a synagogue, saying to the people who were leaving, "Don't expect much from one visit." What that really implies is, if somebody just walks in once thinking, "Zap me!" it's not going to happen. They have to feel comfortable, and for that they have to make repeat visits several times until it finally happens. We have to do something to help, and the congregation has to be welcoming so they want to come back.

If God is *makom*, then the synagogue is but one experience of religion. God can be experienced in a *shivah minyan*, in a hospital room, anywhere. "God is wherever you let God in." I was just thinking about an image someone shared: that God is like a radio wave. All you have to do is turn the radio on. You have to tune into the frequency, but it's always there, like the air itself. I've found that the best sayings about those things are always on church marquees.

The story is told about Michelangelo lying on his deathbed. One of his apprentices comes and says "Michelangelo, you've been known as the man who embodies the spirit of painting and sculpture. How will Rome ever be able to live without you?" With a weak wave of his hand to the windows, with the city beyond filled with all the genius of his creation, he says, "Rome will never be

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without me." I think that's part of the message we are trying to send to people who are dying. The genius of your creation, the impact that you've made in your life will allow us, will allow your family to continue on, even in your absence.

I had an experience last week at a very large funeral held in my synagogue. The entire congregation knew this individual had been fighting a losing battle with cancer. They were anticipating the time when the other shoe would drop. It finally did happen last week and the synagogue was packed to overflowing. He was a physician in the community and touched many lives. We had a series of eulogies, but something happened that I've never experienced before. I don't know if it was the wisdom of my Rabbi or of the man's very devoted wife, but they encouraged him to write down what he wanted to be said at his own funeral. This was different than an ethical will. After all the eulogies, his widow got up and said, "These are Mark's words. He wanted to thank the partners in his practice and he wanted to thank the community for all the kindnesses they had shown him." So here it was that he was speaking to the community, as it were, right from the casket in front of them. Hearing that farewell being read really moved me. These were the final words of that man being spoken at his own funeral service. I've never experienced anything so powerful! When *Aharon* learned of his children's death, the Torah says *vayidom* — he was numb, silent. Sometimes there's nothing you can say. After listening to those last words, there was not much else to say.

Let me offer a few more brief quotes. One is: "Be a *Sukkah*." You might ask, "how does this relate to the dying person?" It's really for the family, for somebody going through a difficult experience. There's a value in being a short-term presence, *sukkat shaleim, sh'leimut, shalom* — be welcoming. The *sukkah* can be thought of as the embrace of God. Also, we can talk about the fact that life is temporary, so if you're a *sukkah* and one of your sides falls down, are you still a *kosher sukkah*? Yes. Even if another half a wall falls down, you're still a *kosher sukkah*. So you might not have everything you'd like to have, but there's still a value, a legitimacy to you. For the journeyman making pilgrimage to Israel, the path up to *Yrushalayim* often led through muddy roads. If your goal is to get somewhere glorious, even the pilgrim had to get through difficult times in life.

Here are a few more. Plato once said "Practice dying every day." "A turtle is not a bird and a human being is not an angel." The reference is to a parable about a turtle who wanted to fly. He asked a couple of birds to help him. So the birds picked him up, and they flapped their wings and the turtle was flying. He thought, "This is great!" As he was flying, he tried to talk to the birds, distracting them. They let go of their grasp and he fell to the ground and his shell cracked. Just as the turtle wished to fly and be a bird, so too, human beings

can wish for specific things, such as to be an angel. Life isn't perfect, we all come across difficult times. We're not living *bashamayim*, you know. This life offers us moments when our shell is going to crack, and it's up to some of us to heal that cracked shell.

My last card says: "Stolen grain should not grow." Much like (please excuse my using this example) when a young woman might be sexually accosted, the fact that she can have a successful pregnancy from that experience is unfair. Nature must have its way — it will grow. Life is unfair. Sometimes even stolen grain will grow even though it shouldn't. You shouldn't have cancer, you shouldn't have that brain tumor. Life stinks sometimes. Our goal is to deodorize, if you will, the spirit of someone who feels, at that moment, that their life stinks.

The task of speaking to someone you know well or hardly know at all is, indeed, the onus that we all carry with the title Hazzan. You're looked to as a spiritual leader both on the *bimah* and off the *bimah*. You are looked to, fairly or unfairly, as a person who has a lot of answers, especially in the realm of life and death. I pray that all of us will find the strength to give strength to those who need it, to seek some of that strength from one another and thereby elevate the rightful place of Hazzan as a co-spiritual leader of our communities. Thank you.

## Spirituality Track

*Hazzan Eva Robbins  
Rabbi Stephen Robbins*

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Thank you all for being here. Steve and I also thank the Cantors Assembly for letting us do what we do, while sharing it with all of you.

Being a child of Holocaust survivors has kept me attuned to the soul-searching questions that one asks when pain and suffering are an essential facet of one's life. At the same time, I came to appreciate how fortunate I was to be alive, and therefore able to play a role in perpetuating a love of Judaism and its beautiful, spiritual practices. As a cantor, I found a container that held all the many sparks that could ignite those around me, and with the added skills of meditation, a vehicle surfaced that united silence with singing, contemplation with expression; all of these necessary components for carving out a relationship with the Holy One. As Steve and I forged a partnership, we taught each other and our community at large, in classes and workshops, how expansive spirituality could become and how truly meaningful text, liturgy and celebration could be. The willingness to open oneself creates a *petach*, a doorway to possibility and transformation. It leads to joy, to moments of comfort, to healing and wholeness, to a true sense of shalom. Peace and serenity are but moments away. Joy and ecstasy — just a step away from going through the portal to new dimensions of awareness.

I think that really articulates what this all means for me, personally and as a cantor. My spiritual practice created openings and pathways so that I could expand personally, and as a *k'li kodesh*, really make myself available to be present in the moment, for myself and for my congregation. I learned that there were ways I could help the people with whom we worked by helping them see that liturgy can be transformative, that it truly is a way to heal and become whole when you understand what the words mean and how to use music and meditation to expand it.

My *yeitser hara* (evil inclination) is tempted by everything which leads me to spend money. But a couple of years ago I was looking at a catalogue which advertised a plaque that said in English the words from

Psalm 46: *Harpu ud'u ki anokhi elohim*, "Be silent and you will know God." I said, "Wow, this is incredible!" but being a student of *shorashim*, I needed to check out this word *harpu* because it seemed to be coming from something within the non-Jewish world, and I wanted to make sure it was accurate. So I went to the dictionary, and I looked up *resh – fey – hey*. It means "to withdraw, to refrain, to desist, to relax." It really doesn't mean "be silent." What it taught me was that to really know the Divine Presence, one has to remove oneself from a lot of external stimuli and really move inward, to withdraw. That's what meditation really is, to move inward and to expand in ways that seem impossible as you walk through life. It became something that I felt I needed to share with other people.

Steve, who comes from a very important line of Kabbalists, the Luria family, really understood this long before I did. He was a great influence on me when he started teaching meditation and how important it is to be in the moment, to be present, to be in the silence, to be able to go inside myself so that I could be more of myself outwardly. That is the incredible dichotomy: the more I was able to go inside, the more I was able to be on the outside. I found in my work as a cantor the exponential growth in the impact I could have on those around me.

All of a sudden the text became a tool for personal growth, for transformative experience, and using cantillation and *nusach* became a vehicle for growth, for change, for really appreciating the richness that is in our tradition. We worked together on how the community could be transformed with his words and my music and we forged this partnership.

In the Chaplaincy track yesterday we spoke about one of the most important influences in our lives, which was a horrific accident involving our two daughters. I was turning 50, and finally going to have my Bat Mitzvah ceremony. I grew up in a "Conservadox" synagogue where young women weren't permitted to become Bat Mitzvah. So at 50 I said to Steve, "You know, this is my gift to myself. I want to take ownership of Torah." But a week before my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, our two daughters were hit by someone who ran a red light. One of them was impacted psychologically and emotionally and the other one, terribly, in a physical way, to such an extent that we thought we were going to lose her. I found I had to dig really deeply inside myself, as a mother, as a cantor and as a clergy person. What

were the tools? What did I have that would help her get through this horrific incident and help her move through her pain?

One of the things I found myself using was music, both before a very important surgery and after. When she came out of the anesthetic, I asked the nurses, "Can I sit with her in the recovery room?" They said, "It's most unusual, but we'll let you do it." So I sat there holding her hand. When they wheeled her out she was totally under, but over the course of an hour, as she emerged from the anesthetic, I sang to her angels' blessings and *niggunim*. As she opened her eyes, she saw my face and heard the music. The nurses were going through their routines, but they were just mesmerized. They said "This is unbelievable. You should be doing this for everyone." I said, "You know, I can't be here for everyone." The result was that we created a recording of music and meditation, because there isn't anything more terrifying than going through surgery or chemotherapy or whatever one has to deal with. It was an awareness for me of how the music has to be present for people in moments of need, in moments of struggle. Even for myself, when things feel really hard and challenging, music becomes an essential tool.

Today, what I want to share is the piece in our working partnership where I use music, cantillation and *nusach* as a way to transform and create a very different kind of moment. I've begun to do it alone, as well. Steve became very ill three years ago and had to pull back. He couldn't work for quite a few months and said to me, "You know, we could close the synagogue or you could just go ahead alone." That's throwing down the gauntlet, right? What's the choice? Do we take a sabbatical, or do I enter into the place that's most terrifying for me, which would be to stand there, alone, without my partner, without the rabbi, and do both. I had to speak, sing the music and create a service where I would be the spiritual leader. That also included providing guidance for the prayers, using meditation, music and imagery, and being *sh'litchat tsibbur* in a very full sense of the word. All of us as hazzanim need to feel comfortable enough to talk, to lead, to speak, give *divrei torah* and *kavvanot* and to lead meditation. We also need to know how important the music that we have is, how great the talent that we have is, and how important it is to be in partnership with our rabbis.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

My experience with meditation goes back to my childhood. I always had spiritual experiences, and it was my grandmother who explained what was happening to me. I felt, as I still do, that I was crazy or stranger than everyone else. That comes out of the experience of our family. My grandmother began to teach me what her father, the chief Rabbi of Vitebsk, Avraham Yosef Luria, had taught her. The Luria family has a long history. Yitzchak, my ancestor, is buried in Montpelier, in southern France. The date on his tombstone is 1350. The lore of the family goes back into southern France around 900. The Luria family split at the Inquisition, some going to Europe and some going back to Africa. Their tradition was about healing. Healing is a combination of meditation and healing techniques.

That's part of what I used on our daughter when her pelvis was broken off her spinal column in that accident. They said she wouldn't live or that she wouldn't walk, that she would be incontinent and that she could never become pregnant. Now we have a two-year-old grandson, and Rachel is normal.

It was all of this tradition that fused into a moment in which the two of us began to do something very different than we had done before. I'd been teaching meditation and Kabbalah at the University of Judaism for about 15 years. I taught Introduction to Kabbalah, Introduction to Meditation, Advanced Meditation and Advanced Kabbalah; four classes every semester, four times a year. All the classes were always full, a staggering experience, because when we initially offered them, the director of the program said, "Maybe you'll get a few people to show up." Instead, thousands of people came through the program, learned to meditate and came to experience *t'fillot* in which the meditational experience was part of the *matbei'a*. We did not change the nature of the *t'fillot*. We integrated the experience of meditation into the *t'fillot*, attempting to understand what the flow of the *t'fillot* meant.

There is a neurobiological rhythm which I, as a psychologist, have identified. My doctorate is in Psychoneural Immunology. Looking at the nature of the neurobiological response to experience, one can graph it on the structure of both the brain and neurochemistry. There is a rise and a fall to the worship service, so we can use the rise and the fall to generate an

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experience with intention, not by accident. The person who most regulates that response is the hazzan.

I'm co-founder and past president of a rabbinic, cantorial and chaplaincy school in Los Angeles which is called the Academy for Jewish Religion, California. We have approximately 40 graduates and now 65 students. We're right on the brink of receiving accreditation. We're the only cantorial school outside of New York or Boston. I teach the rabbinic students that the worship service belongs to the hazzan and that the role of the rav is to use his or her skill to set up the hazzan so that the congregation can help participate in what the hazzan does since, as my wife teaches, hazzanim are the descendants of the *kohanim*, because they lift the *t'fillot*. This partnership is adding understanding and insight to the worship experience. That's the partnership between rav and hazzan, because the spiritual experience in Judaism is not without content. It is having content, because informing the mind makes it possible for the mind to leave behind concern about oneself and about competence.

When we talk about meditation in Judaism, there isn't a single word for it. There are a variety of different kinds of meditation: there are *hitbad'ut* which is inner silence, *hishtapchut* which means the pouring out of self, *hitbon'nut* which is the building or repair of the self. Also, there are stages of meditation such as *d'veikut* which is the cleaving and the binding of oneself to God, and *hitlahavut* which is ecstasy, or being inflamed. A term we use in service is *nehegeh yomam valailah*, which, as you know, is usually translated as "meditate," but it really comes from a word which means "to nod in thought." It's kind of "Oh, yeah, I've got that ..." This process of *nehegeh* or *nehegut* is an old rabbinic process in which you fulfill the tradition of the men of the Great Assembly who would meditate for an hour before they would pray, and then, according to tradition, would meditate for an hour after they prayed. In other words, prayer was the centerpiece of the process of meditation.

Often, on *erev* Yom Kippur, we're told we're going to do *Kol Nidrei* saying something like "Come on, everybody hurry, sit down, come on, get quiet, everybody quiet? Now, let's pray!" We all know how much that doesn't work, because we're living with a clock. In our services, we have about 20 minutes of meditation before we ever begin to open a siddur.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Steve brought up *Kol Nidrei* as the paradigmatic example of rushing to pray. Every time I've led *Kol Nidrei*, it's a court, a *beit din*. The people need to hear that, to be absolved. There's often a flood of people who come in, then the doors are shut and we chant it again. I look to the rabbi for cues and it's very unnatural, it sets a tone for panic. We try to avoid that.

One of the most important parts of the service for me is the sitting *kedushah*. What I learned about the sitting *kedushah* is that the Rabbis argued and fought against keeping it in the service. It was the Kabbalists, the mystics, who won, because they understood that we needed time to really meditate, to slow down and get into that special place so we can prepare ourselves to continue. That's why it's a sitting *kedushah*, not a standing *kedushah*. I have found that in that moment in the service, I take time and lead people through the process of imagining and getting themselves to the place of being the angel you are when you rise for the standing *kedushah*. I am speaking of the sitting *kedushah* in *shacharit*, as opposed to the standing *kedushah* in the *amidah*. It is said that the latter *kedushah* was outlawed for a certain period of time so this was added in order to confuse the authorities. It is the same with the *Sh'ma* — we have extra *Sh'mas*. I've heard multiple explanations, but I prefer the concept that the Rabbis felt how important it was to maintain it and keep it in the service.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

I need to give you some background here. The meditation system we're going to teach you is in the packet. You'll see that it's a triangle. This meditation system has grown out of the teaching I received as a child and in my kabbalistic studies, and is based on a purely kabbalistic approach. I've been trained in Asian meditation systems, both Hindu and Buddhist. I found that there is a difference between Asian and Jewish meditation in goal, and therefore, in technique. Remember that the goal of Judaism is an investment in this world — *tikkun olam* — the understanding that we can repair it. But that involves attachment, not detachment, and attachment means that you have to deal with the issue of intensity.

Intensity is the fundamental problem of life, and it's the fundamental problem of modern society. Intensity is currently defined as

stress, something we are all supposed to learn to manage or to avoid. However, *we* understand meditation as learning to manage stress so that stress doesn't manage you, and that means to become proficient with intensity. You only become good with intensity when you learn how to use intensity to calm you, not just to excite you, because moments of great depth and silence are also intense. They move you, they shake you, they change you — probably more than moments of great sound. The idea is not to be empty, but to be a vessel.

When Eva showed me the verb *harpu*, I said, "that's exactly the same principle as *tsimtsum*." Remember that the Holy One generates existence by withdrawing and making room for it. My favorite example is to imagine parents who never get out of their child's face. You know what that child grows up like — either withdrawn, or absolutely rebellious. It's why the Holy One is veiled in existence, because God's presence overcomes everything. Therefore, there is no choice, there is no capacity to function. All of existence is a vessel, and the vessel is consistently filled by the flowing of God's presence. The question is, how do we use the flow?

The issue of distance from God, or closeness, is not a matter of what God does, it's a matter of what we do. The traditions of kabbalistic meditation and *t'fillah* are about how to draw nearer to the flow, the presence, the *shefa*, the abundance that God is always providing, and overcome the intensity which creates all the noise in our life and the chatter in our heads. The clatter in our bodies doesn't stop. We get so overwhelmed, we can't slow down. So the goal of the system that I developed out of these teachings is to provide a very simple way to get into a meditative state without having to spend lots of time or effort, without having to escape, as it were.

There are a number of traditions which come out of a variety of texts. One, of course, is Torah. Others are *Sefer Y'tsirah* and *Sefer Bahir*, two ancient kabbalistic texts which are fundamental to understanding the nature of meditation, and, of course, some texts from *Zohar*.

I won't go through all of them with you, but I'm going to refer to a couple of them which are important in Torah. The first one you all know — *Ru'ach elohim m'rachefet al p'nei hamayim* — a wind from God sweeping over the water. When you study the text of *Sefer Y'tsirah*, the words *ru'ach*

*elohim* are understood as prophecy, so every time you see *ru'ach elohim* it really means consciousness. Consciousness talks about presence. The concept in kabbalistic experience is not energy, that's a word which is used in Hindu and Buddhist teachings. We're talking about presence.

When you deal with the prophetic experience from Avraham through Yehezkel, you're dealing with God being present. There is no greater presence than at the bush, the personal experience, or at Mount Sinai, which is the communal experience. Take the word "*Sinai*" and break it apart. There are two *yuds* and the word *neis*. This means the miracle of God's presence which flows into the capacity for humans to manage it, the *yeitser hatov* and *yeitser hara*, the good and evil inclinations. So *ru'ach elohim* is prophecy while the *midrash* talks about *m'rachefet al p'nei hamayim* like the mother eagle hovering over her child's nest. It's this constant sense of presence which is always there. It's the *sh'khinah* experience, *al roshi hash'khinah* — the Presence of God resting upon my head.

The Torah then says, "*vayomer elohim y'hi or, vay'hi or.*" It's badly translated by having God say, "Let there be light, and there was light." The question is what is the *vav* there? Is it a *vav hahipuch* (which changes tense) or is it a *vav* that is consecutive? If you make it a *vav* that is consecutive, then the text reads, "God said 'Become light, and continue becoming light.'" That's the way I prefer to translate it. I checked grammatical sources and they agree. So the issue of this flowing of the presence is constant.

Genesis 2:7 reads, "*Vayyitseir adonai elohim et ha-adam afar min ha'adamah vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim, vay'hi ha'adam l'nefesh chayah.*" "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Here we have the two other dimensions of the soul — *n'shamah* and *nefesh*. If you look at the first word, *vayyitseir*, if you know a little *dikduk* (grammar), you know that it is misspelled. In the future form of the verb *yatsar*, there is no double *yud* — one of the *yuds* drops out. So how come God misspells? God doesn't know a little *dikduk*? In other places in Torah it's spelled correctly, but here we have two *yuds*. Every time two *yuds* appear together it indicates the presence of *Hashem*. In the word "*chayyim*," (life), the *chet* stands for *cham* and the *mem* for *mo'ach* — passion and insight — and the presence of God joins them together. That's a meditation that I developed for drawing the

two sides of the body together. Here in *vayitseir*, one *yud* is for the *tsaddi*, which means *tsaddik* (righteous). What does the *tsaddi* do? Look, the *tsaddi* is a bent *nun* and a *yud*. The *nun* is for *ne'eman*, a faithful person who carries the presence of the Holy One on his back. The *resh* which stands for the *rasha*, the *yeitser hara*, the evil inclination, balances only on one point and is always liable to fall over. If it didn't have the *tsaddi* next to it, it would collapse. These are kabbalistic understandings of the letter which begin with Rabbi Akiva's *Sefer Otiot*, The Book of Letters.

So the Holy One makes a compaction, because that's what the word means. Not "forms," but "compacts." *Adam afar* — it's not man from particles of earth. Again, if you know a little grammar, it's a *s'michut* of *adam* and *afar*, so, it really means "the human of particles," *min ha'adamah*, out of the earth. We are made of particles. It's an interesting insight.

Then it says, "*vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim*." If you look at the word *nishmat*, we now have *n'shamah*, but it's *chayyim*, and *chayyim* is God's presence in *cham* and *mo'ach*. *Cham* is right brain and *mo'ach* is left brain. *Cham* is passion, spirituality, creativity and intensity, but the left brain is control and management. In the Tree of Life — *eits chayyim*, it's *chokhmah* and *binah* (wisdom and understanding). God is *keter* (crown). The two *yuds* are *keter*. This is the balancing of the brain which has the capacity to manage that insight, which God breathes in. It means that God is always here. Luria refers to it as the *n'shikah*, as the kiss. The kiss is always present, and it always fills us with air.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Steve coined the phrase, "Divine CPR." I think it's the most beautiful image — that we are constantly being revitalized by *Hashem*, by God's presence.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

God is always breathing into us, so you don't take a breath, you receive it. Do you feel the difference? We're always struggling to breathe. I have a lung disease. My lungs have collapsed and I have been near death three times, so I can tell you what it's like to not have a breath. But when you receive a breath, when that mask comes over your mouth and they're pushing air into you, believe me, it is a great gift.

This notion that the Holy One, the *sh'khinah*, is always here, kissing us, sustaining us, so that the breath is received, that's *ru'ach*, that's *m'rachefet al p'nei hamayim* and what we receive is *nishmat chayyim*. We receive the *nefesh* through the *ru'ach*, and when we exhale, the *ru'ach* coming in becomes *nefesh*, it sustains us. We live not just by physical processes, we live because of our spiritual and cognitive process. We are both, and so the exhalation is the *nefesh* which we give back to the Holy One. We breathe back into the Holy One and the Holy One breathes us back in so that nothing of us is lost.

The image I like best is a very gutsy one, but Kabbalah is very gutsy. That image is that when you kiss someone whom you love, the person to whom you're making love, your spouse, your lover, in that passion you are breathing in and out of each other's mouths, and the binding of that sharing of breath is fantastic. If you've ever done CPR, which I have, then you know what it feels like to have someone's life in your mouth. To give it and to receive it back. Then there is a pause. A no-breath, I call it, which is *n'shamah*. That's the place where you sigh and then stop for a moment. In that moment the body and the mind go very still. You can actually see it if you are measuring it using a variety of instruments. You can be very quiet and still.

At that moment we are one again with the Holy One, until we need the breath. That doesn't mean you hold it until you are going to pass out — your brain lets you know when you need to breathe. You don't have to think about it. It may be a few seconds in the beginning. In my case, I can go as long as a minute-and-a-half when I'm in deep meditation.

Inhale, exhale, pause, is the first way you learn how to breathe. That's infant breathing.

Remember when you would walk into the room of your infant? They're lying in the crib, and you'd be sitting there, waiting for the next breath, worrying if they were going to take it. Then suddenly, they breathe. In that moment when they're not breathing, there is that moment of stillness. Your autonomic nervous system slows down, your adrenal medulla stops producing adrenaline, your brain chemistry shifts, and you stay in what's called a parasympathetic state; a state of complete quiescence. It is so restful and is the same breath, the same state as the *n'shamah*. There

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we simply rest in silence. What this does is create a process that slows you and steps you down, in which your mind does not cease functioning, but your preoccupation with yourself goes away.

The goal is not to stop thinking, the goal is to be conscious, but not to be concerned about anything. An obsessive sense of preoccupation with either what has happened or what is going to happen is called worry. Does anyone here not worry? I don't worry. It's probably what's kept me alive in all I've gone through. The only way you can be present in a moment is not to be concerned about what has happened and not to be concerned about what will happen, not even to be concerned about yourself in the moment you're in, but simply to experience the being that is consciousness without content. At that moment, what will rise from you is your own content, or the content of your *n'shamah*, which we understand is not you, nor is it me; it is the presence of the Holy One. It is a God-spark, because we are the extension of the *n'shamah*, not the other way around. I am not a body with a soul, I am a soul with a body.

In the same way, regarding the lights of the candles of *Shabbat*, it's not the candle that's important. The candle creates a locus for the flame. So are we a locus for the *n'shamah*, for the *ru'ach* and for the *nefesh*. That's why the body is called the *guf*, a depth, that which can contain and hold.

In preparation for doing a meditation, we're going to practice how to do this breathing. Inhalation happens through the nose, into the belly, diaphragmatically. With singers, I never have to teach inhalation. It should be done slowly. This is controlled breathing — slowly because you're enjoying it. It is serving a purpose, it is filling you. The *kavvanah* here is that the Holy One is breathing into me, bringing me to consciousness. Unlike the general Asian approach, there is no pause before you exhale, because you have taken it in and it has turned to *nefesh*, the life force, which you have used and no longer need, and so you return it back. Exhalation is, again, through the nose, outward to the Holy One.

There are other breathing systems that use the mouth, but in this primary system, the nose is important because in the kabbalistic system it's important that your tongue remain in touch with the palate of your mouth. That keeps the tongue in control. The tongue is calm and you cannot say things that are inappropriate. Ironically, neurobiologically what that does

is the same as when babies suck their thumbs. It calms them, not because of the sucking, but because of the rubbing against the palate of the mouth. When you push against the palate of the mouth, all of the connective tissue in your body will relax. As we grow, we forget this technique. When you do that, you will feel the whole body come apart and just melt. (It's an adjustment for singers who need to breathe through the mouth when they're singing. This is a little bit different, but it creates a whole different place for yourself). The most salutary part of sleeping is when the mouth is shut. When the mouth is open, you actually don't sleep as well.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

In this meditation there is a point at which we really own this relationship. You will see that on the hand-out it's listed as *ru'ach*, but we express it internally as *ruchi*.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

The *nefesh* is let go of, the mouth is closed. It is a surrender. It is the giving up, the returning of your being without fear. Then exhale through the nose, again controlled in the same way that you inhaled, so in effect you're going to do an equilateral triangle. Without forcing yourself to be empty (because you really have to push to do that), but just until you relax. At that moment, there's a stop, a hold for a few moments. After you've given yourself back to the Holy One, there is the sense of focusing on the silence of *yichud* (oneness). In kabbalistic terms that means unification. The *shem* is *yichud*. I do this for the sake of the unification of *Hakadosh, Barukh Hu, ush'khintei*. The understanding here is that we're making *yichud*, until there is the need again to inhale. When I do it, I'll do it so the breaths are short. I know you are all capable of much longer breathing, but you'll get to that on your own. In the way we personalize it, as Eva was saying, it becomes: *ruchi, nafshi, nishmati* so that there is a deep sense of personal connection, personal *yichud*, that this is about me.

There are specific positions for seated meditation; the most important is for your feet to be on the floor and your hands on your knees, preferably palms down (although palms up is OK). If you want to do a more yoga-like approach, there is a description of it in *Sefer Y'tsirah*. In this

position your feet come together, your fingers go on your toes, your head is down, pointed toward your genitals. It's called the membrum. There is a unification of heaven and earth and the ten *s'firot* in the feet and in the hands. The goal is to understand that your hands and feet are drains which will release either up or down. We don't cross anything, because unlike the chakra system which ends at the coccyx, the *s'firotic* system includes the legs and the feet because *malkhut* is at the feet which is the location of the sum of our being.

Now, close your eyes and focus on the image of *harpu ud'u*. Let yourself turn inward, because the outer world is not important now. It is the inner world of *olam katan*, of your being: the existence in miniature. As you turn inward, experience the gratitude you have of being alive; the gratitude of being a vessel of God's intention. You are a *k'li kavannah*, for God intended you to be here, just the way you are, which means you are willing to remove all judgment about yourself. Let yourself withdraw from all concern about your life. Whatever is going on that happened, it's not important now. Come back to it later. And whatever will happen later is of no concern because it yet awaits you. What is fundamental is what is now. For in this place there is no time, there is only presence; your own being.

We now begin the cycle of *NuRaN* breathing: *Nefesh*, *Ru'ach*, *N'shamah*. Focus on the presence of the Holy One, the *sh'khinah* before you, and inhale slowly through your nose and into your belly, feeling your belly fill. *Ruchi*. Focus on the word as you inhale. Then, exhale. *Nafshi*, as you return your life force back to the Holy One; in gratitude releasing yourself. Then when you're empty, pause, and rest in *nishmati*, my *n'shamah*, the spark of God's presence that is the crown of my soul. Experience the silence. Again: *ruchi*, in; *nafshi*, out; *nishmati*, hold. Focus just on your breathing. There is nothing more important now than your breath. Stay with your breath and its ebb and flow, surrendering yourself to the presence of the Holy One. Let your mind become like a pool of water, still and calm, surface as smooth as glass; still ... all the way down into the depths.

Now remain in your state of meditation as I share an image with you. The triangle you have created is like the space between the two *k'ravim* (cherubs) on the cover of the ark; their wings extended, facing downward into the space between their kneeling bodies, looking at the very center. Torah says, "I will know You and there I will speak with You." It's this

negative space, this open door that is the place we focus on now. Like the space between the candles on Shabbat or the space between two *tsitsit* hanging on a *tallit*. It is the *sha'ar shamayim* of Ya'akov, it is the place where God is always present, the space we do not look at because we are so preoccupied with the physical place. You've now created the spiritual place through which to gaze.

When you're ready you can open your eyes and return to the room.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

When I work with other people, I speak about being able to express yourself and use your voice and the connection between the Tree of Life and the posture, between the mysticism and the techniques, between the breath and filling and God's presence. There's a huge connection between what we do technically as singers and the mystical element in God's presence.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

In the structure of *tikkun hanefesh*, this Lurianic meditation, there is an understanding from the *Zohar* and other sources that the *Eits Chayyim* is in the face. So *keter* is the forehead, the eyes are *chokhmah*, the ears are *binah*, the nose is the middle six *s'firot* and the mouth is *malkhut*. It's all in your face. The mask, as it were, is fundamental to being able to do one thing; to express God. God comes out of the face. There's a whole meditation around that which is absolutely fantastic.

There are systems I use with singers who are blocked, who can't get it. Their larynx will drop, their shoulders will go back, their head will go up and their diaphragm will drop, because the understanding is that when the face closes down, the rest of the body closes down. The beginning of that is found in the way your jaw is set. Jaw, mouth and throat are called *da'at*, which means knowledge. It's the capacity to fully express that which the Holy One needs you to express.

This system is 2,000 years old. The singing technique is built not on that particular knowledge, but as I said, truth is truth. So when you're preparing to sing this way, the meditation I use with hazzanim is to use the face as the face of the Holy One, so it's not your face that's out there.

We don't see ourselves the way we look. While I'm talking to you, I don't know what you're seeing, (thank God). But that's so I don't become

preoccupied with the way I look. But you are preoccupied with the faces of others so that you can read from them whether or not they're seeing the Holy One's expression coming from you. You can also tell that when you see people sing — if they're into their performance or if they're into the experience. It shows. You read it all in face and body. That's what our congregants see from the Rav and the Hazzan. When we are doing our work, are we concerned about our performance or are we into our *t'fillah*? The voice should not be the concern, it's the *t'fillah* that's the concern. There's a real discussion about how you meditate in and out of that.

I and some other of my patients have gone through major surgery without anesthetic using this technique. I prepare people for surgery and go into surgery with them, and then come out using this and other techniques. One of my patients had a laparotomy: the surgeons opened her gut, removed 60% of her liver and then put it back. She was on minimal anesthetics, so she was in a twilight sleep. I was breathing with her. At the end of the surgery, had they let her, she would have gotten up off the table and walked out of the OR. She didn't, but she also didn't go into ICU. She went back to her room and within three days she was up and walking. The biggest trauma in surgery sometimes is not surgery, it's the anesthetic. This system will have an effect on that. If you have blood pressure or anxiety problems and you breathe this way, they will come right down.

We always start from this place so even the people who've been meditating with us for ten, twelve years always start from this place. Everyone begins from the same place. The meditation is very generic because everyone meditates in their own way. I don't want people to meditate like me, they only have to meditate like themselves. Everyone's meditation experience is different every time. If you are doing the same thing every time, then you're not deeply in the experience, because each of us is a unique being in our own flow. The experience of meditation is not *sui generis*, it's unique to every person each time. The rabbis tell us the same thing — if your prayer is the same every time, something's wrong. You are yourself, so bring yourself to the moment.

We have people who walk in for the first time on *yom tov* who'll come up afterwards and say "The service was beautiful, but the meditation? I never did that before, I've never had a prayer experience like that before."

There are places within the service where we do things like this: before *Un'tane Tokef* because of its power, before *Ashamnu*, or before the *Viddui*. I may even do it in relationship to a *pasuk* of Torah where we've developed a very good technique.

Torah is not a text to be studied. It is an experience to be had. Torah is a transcendent moment of the Holy One communicating with us, like a mother singing to a baby. And what does the baby do? The baby seeks to sing back. That's our *t'fillot*. That's the dyadic reciprocity between us and God.

We've developed a way to meditate Torah which is what the Kabbalists did. They didn't just read it, they were experiencing it, and we've taught our congregants to do it. The whole key to it is found in the trope. The trope, which we so often do mechanically, is such a beautiful chant that makes it possible for us to shift into this meditative place with *kavvanah*. The text becomes that being sung to, and we teach them to sing it. We're going to do it with you with the *vayyitseir* text.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

What I discovered is that the chant which comes through in a *pasuk*, in a phrase or a word, is something we can actually meditate on, that we can use over and over again. Other traditions call them mantras. I don't know that we have a word for it, but it's mantra-like. It's really experiencing what the text is saying.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

Don't use the word mantra, please. There is one word you can use and that is *m'shaneh*, which means a repetition. "V'shinantam l'venekha v'dibarta bam" means you shall repeat them constantly. When it says in *Pirke Avot*: *hu hayah omer* — "he used to say," what that means is that Hillel would walk around mumbling. Why? So that he wouldn't be in his ego, in his power. The Kabbalists would walk around keeping texts in their head which would keep them in a focal place in which their own preoccupations would not overwhelm them.

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*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

The *m'shaneh* which I referred to as mantra-like, this repetitive word or phrase, can be so transformative. You can help your congregation really feel the Torah when you do this. We're going to experience it in the *vayyitseir*. You don't even have to look at it. I think some of you are familiar with it. I want you just to get comfortable and close your eyes so that you can be in a place to really experience the text itself.

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

We do these exercises more on *erev Shabbat*. At the beginning of an evening people sit, we do a little meditation to begin to open, then I teach the meaning of a text or a whole verse and then we go into meditating. We've had our congregation be in meditative experiences one-and-a-half to two hours, learning the text as a personal experience.

*Hazzan Eva Robbins:*

Close your eyes and be in that place of no-thing-ness. Let yourself do your *NuRaN* breathing now, receiving the gift of the breath from the Holy One, returning it back. Be in a place of acceptance. *Ruchi, nafshi, nishmati*. God has *ahavah* — is full of love. A result of this love is that God wants to create the human, the individual, each one of us. Be in touch with that kind of compassion and love that you can be brought into this world.

*Vayyitseir adonai elohim. Vayyitseir. Compactness. Vayyitseir adonai elohim. Yud heh vav heh* — God, the Creator of All wants to bring you into this world. *Et ha'adam afar min ha'adamah*. Forming you, compacting the particles so that you can come into being. *Vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim*. And God blows into your nostrils *nishmat chayyim*, the soul of your life, the spark. *Vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim vay'hi ha'adam l'nefesh chayah* — a living being. You have been formed into a living being with a soul. *L'nefesh chayah. Vayyitseir adonai elohim et ha'adam afar min ha'adamah vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim vay'hi ha'adam l'nefesh chayah*. Hear the trope. (See Gen 2:7)

*Rabbi Stephen Robbins:*

The Kabbalists teach us that there are four levels to reading Torah. The lowest level is the letters. The next highest level is the vowels. The third highest level is the *tagim*, the crowns on the letters. But the highest level of

all is the trope. And so let's join with Eva now, putting together this vision of Jacob's ladder with the four rungs.

Focusing inward, imagine that you are the *adam* who is being formed as we chant the text together. ...

Now just be with it for a moment in your breathing. Be saturated with the text. ...

Now let's do it again, only this time instead of being tentative, reach deep inside you, the experience that this text brings to you: gratitude, joy, awe, wonder, terror, fear, sense of purpose. Let us do now what comes from the center of that being that is yours. ...

Now let's focus on one phrase: *vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim* — the place where we make contact. We are aware that the contact is made. Focus just on chanting that piece; the awareness that to do it you must take a breath. In this case, you'll take it with your mouth open and you'll see that it is like a kiss. When the text comes back out in your voice as an affirmation of what it is you are experiencing, you have been resuscitated, not only by breath, but by *divrei Torah* by the love of the Holy One. ...

Now, inhale *ru'ach* deeply. That's love. Now pause. Now inhale deeply, *ru'ach*. The exhalation is the words. Pause. Again, *ru'ach*, in.

If you would do this before you go out to lead a service, especially preparing for *yom tov*, and dump everything else, both you and your congregations will experience *t'fillah* at a much deeper level than you ever thought possible. Thank you for your attention.

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## Teaching B'nai Mitzvah Students with Learning Issues

*Hazzan Marcia Lane, Dr. Howard Blas*

*Hazzan Marcia Lane:*

For those of you whom I don't know, my name is Marcia Lane. I'm a believer in taking full advantage of all of the moments of convention, from the very beginning to the very end, and so when Sheldon Levin asked if I would organize this workshop, I agreed because I thought it was such an important topic. Not only was I happy to do it, but I am extremely excited to be able to invite my friend, my colleague and my mentor in this work, Dr. Howard Blas, who I met through B'nai Jeshurun in New York City.

I was a B'nai Mitzvah tutor for B'nai Jeshurun, and I thought I never was going to see any kids with learning disabilities because Howard Blas was *the* tutor. But a young girl was assigned to me who was extraordinarily bright and very sophisticated in many ways. Her parents are the producers of the Fred Friendly seminars on PBS which he started when he was at the Columbia School of Journalism, on which experts from all over the world get together and hold a conversation about various subjects like medical insurance and disability or political campaigns. These experts include senators and heads of major institutions. The parents produced those seminars. The people who were frequently involved in them stayed in their apartment and sometimes had conversations about it. Their daughter, Laura, is a very knowledgeable, bright kid. She went to the Friends' Academy, a private school. No one would have imagined that she had a learning disability that wasn't diagnosed. But when I started working with her, I found out that not only were her Hebrew skills not awfully good, but her sense of what the order of the letters is was a little shaky. The more I worked with her, the more frustrated I got. Of course, I wasn't doing a good job helping her — she knew it and I knew it. I said, "This is not your fault. This is because I don't have the right skills. But I'm going to find out." So I called BJ and said, "Now what do I do?"

The reason no one diagnosed Laura as having the dyslexia she has, is because from the time she was young, her parents figured out that reading was a *tircha* for her. Since reading was a *tircha*, but memorizing, knowing or understanding was not a *tircha*, they just read everything to her, and she could assimilate all of the information instantly. But they didn't read Hebrew. So there was no way they could help her with that. So, I was faced with an extraordinarily bright, high-functioning kid, who couldn't even understand the instructions I was trying to give her. B'nai Jeshurun put me in touch with Howard who coached me on how to work with this child. Not only did she chant her *haftarah* and

Torah sections beautifully, she also gave one of the most moving, inspirational and deeply thought out *Divrei Torah* I've ever heard about the meaning of time. She spoke about why *Moshe* could not get one extra year. It was an extraordinary *D'var Torah* by this child who had an undiagnosed or unsurfaced learning disability.

Today, our goal is to give you two different things to take away with you — new techniques — new ways of thinking about working with children who have different levels or different kinds of learning issues, and maybe even some new materials and new ways of thinking about the materials you usually use.

In the Northeast, Howard is the person who works with more learning challenged kids than anyone I know. He's taken an enormous amount of time out of his camp schedule to be here. I present to you Howard Blas.

*Dr. Howard Blas:*

So how does a man get to be in his forties and consider Bar Mitzvah teaching his primary *parnassah*? I thought I would be a social worker or a child and family therapist. I was working at a child psychiatry clinic at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York and still teaching and tutoring some kids here and there for Bar and Bat Mitzvah. It provided some extra *parnassah* which a hospital social worker can always use, but I had taught in Hebrew schools over the years and there seemed to be more and more kids who people didn't really know how to teach.

They said to me, "You know something about this. Maybe you'll work with them." And I did, privately, outside of the Hebrew schools. A lot of those schools felt they didn't have the tools to teach those learning disabled kids, and it was easier to subcontract the B'nai Mitzvah training.

At the time I had been teaching them as part of my teaching training at the Churchill School, which is one of the premier schools for kids with learning disabilities in Manhattan. My head teacher had an extraordinarily bright kid who played a string instrument, a requirement of the school. He was very bright but he had very severe learning disabilities. His regular tutor knew that the family wanted to do something to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah. He asked if I'd be willing to teach him.

That was my first entry into BJ, because the family was unaffiliated. Try having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah for a kid who's unaffiliated. I thought you could pick up the phone and call the rabbi or the cantor. That wasn't the case. But BJ opened their doors and they actually said, "Listen. We don't usually do this, but if this family is serious, we'll allow it." The family stayed connected with the congregation for a very long time.

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There were all these kids who seemed to be emerging with all kinds of learning issues. Oftentimes they are really bright kids, but with a whole range of learning issues and learning-style differences. It turned out to be very fascinating, essentially taking the same task and trying to get that information inside a youngster, but realizing that he or she really has very different ways in learning. For me, it's been like solving a puzzle. There are a lot of different ways do the Rubik's Cube or put together a 1,000-piece puzzle, and as long as you get to the end, it doesn't really matter what the process is.

Oftentimes, it's really fascinating to engage a kid in the discussion of how you get from here to there. I think the challenge is to know what the tools are that you need for teaching. Since I didn't set out to be a Bar Mitzvah teacher as my profession, I started with a cassette recorder. I always tell the fathers of the kids I tutor that I could guess their age within a couple of years by asking them what they used when they learned their *haftarah*. First it was a vinyl record, then it was reel-to-reel tape, then it was cassette tape and finally it was CDs. And now if you're using CDs, you're way behind the times because now people are using "Garage Band" on their Apples or they put a microphone into their iPod. Technology is cool, and sometimes you have to rely on your own younger children or students to educate you, which is also a good thing. I actually used my time in the car driving here to have three hours of meetings about our campers. We wouldn't have been able to had it involved reading.

So I had a tape recorder, I had my highlighters and I had the original trope sheet the cantor who taught me had made. It's still very smudgy and Xeroxed and I've copied it many, many more times. But even more important than that, I had the experience and memory of my own Bar Mitzvah learning experience which I want to share with you. The first handout sheet I gave you contains some reflections on our own teaching and learning, a kind of thought sheet you can look at in your spare moments.

Where do you start with your students? Why? Wherever you start is that because that's how you were taught? What do you remember about how your teacher taught you your first Torah or *haftarah* portion? What was the method? I ask because every person remembers their B'nai Mitzvah learning process. You remember the impression it left on you. You remember what the cantor wore, how the office was lined up and especially you would remember whether it was a good experience or a bad experience. Ask yourself: did that method work for you? Is that how you would've taught yourself if you were teaching now?

Another question is: if you're teaching adult learners who may have more of an awareness of how they learn, would that be different than teaching a 12-year-old? One of the things I found is that sometimes kids with learning

issues who go to schools where they make it very explicit how they learn, really do know a lot about how they want that information. I was working with a boy who was writing out how he hears things in transliteration. He knew I was going to start teaching a friend of his and he said: “You know, when you teach my friend, you’re going to have to teach him differently than you teach me.”

It blew my mind! They are learning the metacognition of how they learn: I’m a visual learner, but my friend, who I sit next to in school, needs to learn this other way. Of course, the teacher has a huge task, because he or she has to do it big, on the board, multi-sensorially. Those are some of the tools I had for starters.

I want to tell you about my own learning experience for Bar Mitzvah. It was at a big, Conservative, suburban *shul*. Cantor Roothvarg, who is here, took over for the person who taught me for Bar Mitzvah — Cantor Herschel Weitz. As I remember him, Cantor Weitz was a very cool young guy. He’s probably still cool, but not as young as I remember him, because he was my Bar Mitzvah teacher. My parents were very fond of him. They were also very fond of the old *shamash* of the *shul*, Reverend Goldberg. He was a very lovely, old, Eastern European man who used to give watches with Hebrew letters to all the kids he taught — sometimes even Israel Bonds — which is really sweet.

But that wasn’t what made my parents decide to have me work with one over the other. My parents thought I should work with the Cantor because he was probably more methodical and more modern. But we also knew that Reverend Goldberg was the sweetest old man who had a real love for the old ways of doing things. And so, we came up with a compromise. “How about if Howard works with Cantor Weitz for the *haftarah* part of his Bar Mitzvah, but right after that, he’ll learn how to read Torah from Reverend Goldberg?”

The experience with Cantor Weitz was probably much like we teach our students now. There was a trope class where you had to learn how to sing “*mercha tipcha*” a hundred million times, and after you mastered that, you moved on. After you passed the trope class, you met with the Cantor and got your little Shiloh booklet with your *parashah*, and you systematically went through it. He sat across the desk, I on the other side, and we made headway. By the end, I knew all of the *t’amin* sequences and could do my *haftarah*, and could even, presumably, apply that to another *haftarah*. When I was done with Cantor Weitz I was not really done, because then it was time to go to Reverend Goldberg.

With Reverend Goldberg, we essentially stood up in front of the open Torah scroll, and he would say, “Sing with me. *Vay’da beir Adonai*...” I didn’t have any idea how I was supposed to get from standing in front of the *Sefer Torah* to learning how to do this myself. I made the connection when I realized that after

repeating after him, I was going to memorize it. I memorized those three lines of the *maftir*, and that was it, never with an appreciation that the Torah reading has a similar system. But when I looked in the *Tikkun*, I saw that there's the same system. Every time you sing it like this, it looks like this. So I was essentially pulling out from that the same system Cantor Weitz had shown me.

I think most of our students probably get it no matter how we teach them. The majority of students will get it no matter how the teacher teaches, no matter how flexible he or she is, no matter how multi-sensory or not multi-sensory. Most kids will get it, and the ones who don't will be accused of having learning problems or being dumb or whatever. The one thing that all of my street intuition led to was this one word that I take away with me. One teacher of reading used the word — she said that most kids don't suffer from dyslexia. They suffer from *dys-teachia*. I love the idea that when it's not working out between the student and the teacher, the teacher takes responsibility and does not say, "Take this kid who can't learn out of my classroom." Even though most students will probably get it however you teach — the Cantor Weitz way or the Reverend Goldberg way or some other way — we can probably expand our repertoire as teachers and give students more ways that work better for them.

*Hazzan Marcia Lane:*

We have a few case studies of kids who had learning issues, how Howard and I dealt with them and what kinds of tools I use when I am working with a kid who is, in some way, not learning in the expected straight-lined, easygoing way. Say we have a classroom of 20 kids. Fifteen of them are going to learn no matter what you do. They're going to learn in spite of you, not because of you. They're going to learn because learning is what kids do. Of the remaining five, two or three of them will be kids you'll have to figure out how to teach, but they'll get it eventually. The others are going to be kids who are going to require big adjustments in how you teach, or what materials you use or how you think about your relationship with each child.

I have three examples. One is a child who presented as clearly being (the current terminology is) neurologically atypical. This child is now in eighth grade, but he was already identified by the time he was two or three as being neurologically atypical. That means he is somewhere on a long, long, long spectrum which probably has most of us at one end of it, and people who are severely incapable of dealing with interaction between people at the other end of it.

Eric's behavior was not appropriate in one-on-one encounters with people. He would not make eye contact. But he was very bright: he could read,

he could assimilate information — all of those things — but we weren't sure what Eric could or couldn't do. So I met with his parents first. The first right thing you can do when you have a child who you know is going to have learning issues is to sit down and talk to the parents and say, "Tell me about your child. How does this child learn best? What's his current learning situation in his regular school?"

It so happened that Eric not only read English well, he read Hebrew really well. He had a home environment where both parents were active in the synagogue. Both parents understood and could read Hebrew, and that was all to the good. But what we didn't know was what his attention span was going to be and how many different trope systems he could hold in his head. He was on medication, so how long was that Bar Mitzvah service going to last?

His parents had asked specifically that the rabbi and I fashion a Saturday morning service that was not going to be longer than 90 minutes, because we were quite sure that Eric would begin to lose it after 90 minutes, and there would be no way to predict what his behavior on the *bimah* would be. Aside from that, quite frankly, they did not know whether he was going to learn or not learn. They said, "He's very musical and he can repeat a tone back to you so that you have that in your favor, but aside from that, I don't really know." And I said, "Okay, fine."

When I sat down with him the first time, I said, "Eric, there are a lot of different ways I can teach you this. One way is for us to learn it like a puzzle — to learn all the pieces and then put the pieces together. Another way is for us to learn it like we're walking along a path, to learn the journey, and just to keep going from the beginning until the end. What do you like to do? Do you like putting puzzles together or do you like starting at the beginning and getting to the end?"

Eric kind of cocked his head to one side and said, "Puzzles." I said, "Okay." So, I proceeded to teach him trope. Because he already knew how to read really well, I taught him two trope phrases at a time. He highlighted them because that made it easy for him to find them — not because he was going to need the highlighting eventually, but because it was his way of identifying — like playing a searching game.

It's really nice that Trope Trainer will highlight everything for you, but it defeats the purpose for most children. Most children are trying to use eye-mind-hand-voice-ear — all of those different things are trying to work together, so if you give them an already highlighted copy, you've kind of messed up the process for them. It doesn't matter how messy their copy looks when they're done, as long as they do it themselves. Eric highlighted stuff, and he was able to

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sing everything. I said, “Okay, Eric, your job for this week, is when you come back, you need to sing this for me.” No problem.

At this point, I have to back up. We did decide that it might be confusing for him to try to learn two different trope systems simultaneously, so we decided that Eric was only going to do Torah. That way I had flexibility, because I could start with the *maftir* and then teach him as much as he could learn. When it got to a stopping point, I could say, “Till there. We’re not going to do any more of this.” When I first interviewed the parents at their home, I asked, “What other prayers does Eric already know?” They said, “We don’t know. Eric, come here for a second. What prayers do you know? What *t’fillot* do you know that you’d like to do at your Bar Mitzvah?” And Eric said, “*Adon Olam* makes a nice ending.” And he left the room. So he actually had in his mind already a storehouse of melodies and *t’fillot* that he knew.

His parents didn’t know what he knew because he never sang them solo and, sometimes, he didn’t even sing to them in a group. When his school group was called up, he would go and stand on the *bimah* and twist his hair and not sing. So we had no way of knowing what he actually knew. We studied Torah, and the next week he came back and he could sing everything for me. He completely understood the process that we were going through. Every week we added a phrase group or two, and every week he learned it. Then, when I gave him the page from the *tikkun*, he looked at it, and he went like this — back and forth and back and forth. Then he just sang it. That taught me so much.

One day, when he came in, I said, “What’s going on, Eric? What’s up? What’s the news?” He said, “People are like robots.” I said, “Can you explain that, please?” He said, “Implants. iPods. People are like robots.” I said, “Thank you so much. Sit down. Let’s work.” He also used to play with his Slinky while he was learning. Sometimes I would say to him, “You can’t have that until you’ve done this.” So then he would do what I asked, and then he would reach for the Slinky. On the day of his Bar Mitzvah, 90 minutes turned out to be absolutely, totally perfect. At 95 minutes, Eric was done.

These are some areas of concern I learned from Eric: timing is important, asking the child what he or she prefers, being flexible according to what you can teach or just to keep going until you stop. Don’t say, “I’m only going to teach this much,” but be flexible.

Another neurologically atypical student had ADD and all sorts of learning issues. Every time he came to me, he was frantic and hysterical. His parents told me that he vomits the night before Torah lessons. I thought, “Oh my, this child is going to have an ulcer before he’s 13. This is really bad.” So, the second time he came to me, we didn’t do anything. He said, “But, but, but, we

should work. We should work." I said, "Naw, not today, not today." I made him talk to me, but he had his book open. He kept waiting for me to work. I wouldn't work. I said, "Close the book. That's not what we're doing today." For him, to be able to do anything, I had to take away the expectation that this was going to be very serious and important stuff. Sometimes, I would stop in the middle of a lesson and just say, "You know, it's time to breathe, Ryan. Let's all breathe, shall we?" I had to take away the stress of what would normally be a 45-minute session.

Eric, however, really thrived with a regular pattern. He liked to know what the pattern was going to be. First, I'm going to say "hi." Then, I'm going to ask him what the day was like, what his week was like. Then, he's going to read what he studied over the week. Then, we're going to learn something new. Then, I'm going to ask him to repeat back what his assignment was. And then he's going to go away.

This second child could not. It just made him a nervous wreck. So, I kept changing. Sometimes he would come in all set to do something. I would say, "No. Let's have an English day today. Let's talk about the meaning of this." Because that's a conversation you could have without stressing out. This child was not aided by his family. The first child had a family that really understood what they needed to do to help me help their child. The second family said, "Well, he has to do this, and he has to do a *haftarah* because that's Bar Mitzvah, and he has to read from the Torah because his grandparents would think it wasn't right if he didn't read from the Torah. And by the way, this summer we're going to Israel, so he's got to learn a different Torah portion for Israel." They did everything that they could to make this kid a frantic, hysterical wreck. Also, both of the parents were very nervous themselves.

Howard and I were talking earlier about kids who are neurologically atypical frequently having parents who are also neurologically atypical. This second child's parents fit the bill to a T. You can recognize these people because they haven't chosen a date. They're a year late, and while they reserved a date, they haven't really chosen it, and they're changing it. And, well, maybe we'll do it in Israel or maybe we'll do it in the synagogue. They keep going back and forth. This is what happened to this second child. It got right down to the wire and I said, "I am scheduled to start working with your son 32 working weeks before his Bar Mitzvah. If you can tell me when that is, that would be useful."

Another thing about this child is that he was on medication that ran out after school was over at 3 o'clock. He would come to me at 3:15 already having lost it. His ability to pay attention was already pretty shot. Nevertheless, he had incredible determination. He couldn't tell up from down, musically. He didn't

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read Hebrew well and he was frantic, yet he learned his *maftir*. He learned his *haftarah*, which I cut. I made it 12 verses, not 21, and he learned a *maftir* to do in Israel.

On the day of his Bar Mitzvah, guess what? His medication was fresh. The kid came in totally calm and totally focused and totally able to do what he had done in agony for the past eight months. It was a difficult situation, but the kid pulled it off. He did a great job. The grandparents were happy. Everyone was happy. I was thrilled, totally relieved.

The last case I want to tell you about is a child who is totally neurologically typical, reads Hebrew and is smart. The way his learning challenge manifested itself was that he was completely disorganized. He would leave things in various places, forgetting where he put them. He would forget what I told him even though he had written it down at the back of the binder that I give the kids.

I personalize each book, which means that before I print out each *haftarah*, I ask them which typeface they like. I show them three or four different typefaces and I say, “Which one is clearer to you? Which one can you read better?” Then I print it out in that typeface. I separate the trope phrases in the sentences so that they can see them. I do a lot of things to personalize the binder for them.

But for this child, the one thing I did that made the most sense was that I printed out a copy of the calendar page for each month. Every time the child came to me, at the end of the lesson, I wrote down what we had done. So here’s Monday: lesson. This is where we met. Today is our lesson. And next Monday — lesson. I would write it on the calendar. Also, I would write on every single day of the week what I needed that child to do. Verses one through three — I need you to repeat it three times. Once slowly, and then a little bit more smoothly. On day two, I need you to do verses six and seven. Seven is a long one. On day three, I need you to do verses one through seven. I told that child exactly what was expected. I didn’t leave it up to his imagination — even for an instant — because he could not organize it.

I keep a complete folder for every child. It has duplicates of every child’s Torah portion, *haftarah*, English translations, everything. So that if someone comes without materials, I’ve got their materials. If someone says, I’ve lost it, I dropped it in the lake, I did this, I did that, I have copies already made. I don’t even have to go copy them. They’re already in their folder. This child went through several sets of copies. That’s just the way it was. He was very disorganized. He frequently showed up at the wrong time because he would walk out and forget what time he was supposed to show up and he’d tell his mother

something different.

I also have a communications system with parents. At the end of every day my last task of the day is to sit down at the computer and send an email to every single parent and say, "Jacob's doing very well. Here's what we covered. Here's what he didn't do from last week that I'd really like him to pay more attention to for this week. If he does that, we will be totally on track." Or I'll write, "Caroline didn't work at all this week, so we ended up having to cover the same material. I just wanted to let you know that she needs to find more time to work this week."

Sometimes, the problem isn't the kids, but the parents who pick them up early. So I let the parent know that this is disruptive to their child's progress. You need to do your part to help your child, which doesn't mean sitting there and staring at them while they practice. Some parents can help. Some parents can't. For the children who are disorganized, I feel it's my job to help them be as organized as I can possibly help them to be.

One final note before I turn this back over to Howard. A lot of the things I do, you already know how to do, like dots to indicate whether something goes up or down. I make them use my colors when they highlight so that every child is using the same color for *etnachta*. First of all, it keeps me sane, and second of all, it means that I have control over that one little piece of the process. I might be wrong about that — Howard would be able to tell me if I'm wrong about that. I had a friend who said, "Oh, I let them choose their favorite colors." I thought, "Well, that's a mess." Then they can say, "today my favorite color for *etnachta* is something different," and they could choose something different. I couldn't do that, so I helped the kids to stay organized, because then I can say to them when they go to Torah, "Okay, what color is *etnachta*?" They say, "Yellow." I say, "Okay. Go find your *etnachta* phrases." Then the children begin to do the work for themselves because they are able to understand what we're trying to teach them.

*Dr. Howard Blas:*

I don't think there's a right way about what color *etnachta* should be. I let them choose. What I do say to them is, "This one's going to come up a real lot, so pick your absolute favorite color for *katon*." As long as it's consistent, always the same color. There's no right way and no wrong way.

I'm going to tell you about some complex students, but I'm going to stop short of telling you about kids who have augmented communication devices. If I were to come back another time, I would love to talk about really thinking completely out of the box, of kids who don't speak but use a Power

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Point presentation of their mother's voice or something like that. I worked with a boy who uses a DynaBox Dynamo communication device. I won't even tell you the *halakhic* issues that raises in an Orthodox *shul* on *Shabbat*.

I'm going to talk about a student I've been fascinated with because he does some work in our camp. He has the diagnosis of being mentally retarded and autistic, and he's very complex. He did have a *Shabbat* morning Bar Mitzvah. His parents — the mother's an educator and the father's a rabbi — are wonderful. Years ago, they started with a kind of a Montessori method. Very tactile kind of stuff. They literally introduced him to Hebrew through letters drawn in sand, feeling the *Alef-Bet*. They began stringing letters together into blends and they also used sign language. Then they taught him sight words, which appeared in his Torah reading.

We have a second case, also a rabbi's son who has cerebral palsy. They said that he's twice exceptional. That means he has two very special things going on. He has cerebral palsy and can only read on a second grade level, but he could literally sit through his father's Talmud class or a graduate level philosophy class and follow in an auditory manner, so he's really exceptional in both ways. He's also severely dyslexic.

In the first case of the boy who has mental retardation and autism, they began teaching him sight words — words you recognize by seeing them. These are words in English that you can't really decode, like "who" — w-h-o. You can't really read it. You just have to get it. They said, let's look at his *parashah*, and let's start teaching him by visually memorizing those words that appear there. They started with words he would be likely to recognize. They took his Torah reading from the *tikkun*, magnified it to a very large size and taught him only from there. They kept reducing it in size as he learned it. So he'd see the word, "Moshe," and he would recognize it from the sight word. They taught him without *n'kudot*. He took a picture of it and he'd see that picture in context. The father chuckled and said, "It will also help protect the Torah from his drooling." By doing that from the very beginning, it helped him at his Bar Mitzvah when he was up there reading from the Torah.

Some teachers feel that showing students what the *tikkun* looks like, showing what the Torah looks like, will scare your learners. They're going to say, "Oh my God. I'm never going to get there." I think the opposite. I like to show the whole package. I tell them: "What's in this booklet is what you're going to do. You're going to get to this point. We're going to get there together, but when you get up in front of the Torah scroll, this is what it's going to look like. It may be bigger or smaller, but all *Sifrei Torah* look the same. For the most part, every column starts with a *vav*, but this is what it looks like." I think it demystifies the

experience for any student to show them what the end point is. In this case, they started with the end point and then worked backwards.

*Hazzan Marcia Lane:*

Even though some of us may never work with children with that level of disability, to think about what it means to be a tactile learner means that if the child can trace something in the air, that's important. Give them scratch boards — you write on them, then lift the film and then use that impression to have a child trace something over and over again, or trace the pattern of the music of the trope over and over again, and say, "Okay. Good. Do it again." There are many different ways to think about tactile learning. It doesn't have to be with a child who's at the extreme end of the spectrum.

*Dr. Howard Blas:*

We had a colleague who was also a singer and actress and was very dramatic. She would do a piece which was helpful for the parents, because a lot of parents have no clue what you're doing with their kids. You can show them what the little squiggly symbols mean, what the wishbone indicates and what the little diamond sounds like. But this colleague took it to another level. She would say, "You know, it's like if you go to an Italian opera and you don't understand the language and there's no translation." She would sing "She was going, to the store ..." As if something very dramatic was going to happen. It showed the parents in a way they could understand that, even if you don't understand the words, you get the idea that something important is going to happen through the signs' directions, up or down. She would ask the kids, "What does it sound like? Show me with your body what that sounds like."

*Hazzan Marcia Lane:*

I ask some of my girls, "Do you do ballet? Do you dance?" They'll say, "Yes." I sing, *kadma v'azla, r'v'i'i*. I have them repeat that and say, "No, it's like getting taller and taller and then release." Then I have the kids do that. It becomes a kind of visual sign language so that if I see a child staring at something in the Torah, I can give them the body-chironomy because we've invented it together, and they know what I'm doing. When I move like this, it's *mercha tipcha*. It's a way that I can cue them.

*Dr. Howard Blas:*

Great! If you look at the second sheet that says "Torah Self-Transliterations," I want to focus more on the part that says "With student-invented systems of

*t'amim.*" On the paper, number one, this boy Jesse was very smart and way more gifted and advanced than I am musically. He really wanted me to sing it perfectly each time so he could listen. He did this in colors. He wrote exactly how he heard it. Each sequence was a different color, so he really was making up his own trope system. He went through each word after we had transliterated it and wrote it exactly how he heard it. If I put the *t'amim* under it, he would come up with the same. He knew exactly how *r'vi'a* sounded, and he would write the same kind of signs over each one.

Another boy came up with a legend, like a key on a map. He said, "Bold means you go down." I usually write it or type it, though, a lot of times, I'll have the kids write it out themselves. Beyond transliteration, he said that italics means that it sounds fluttery, or underlined means that it goes up and down. I would ask him how I should type it and, he would say, "*El Moshe-e-e.*" Then he would say, "and make that bold." I couldn't keep that system in my head, so I said, "You have to remind me what's our system." He said, "That's italicized."

*Hazzan Marcia Lane:*

I remember working with a cantor (who shall remain nameless), who said that transliteration was cheating, and that no child should use or make a transliteration. They had to read the Hebrew. If reading Hebrew is the whole point, well, then, you have a completely different idea of what Bar or Bat Mitzvah is. However, if you view Bar and Bat Mitzvah as a coming of age, assuming responsibility, studying something new and demonstrating an ability to learn something new, then transliteration is as much a valid task as anything else.

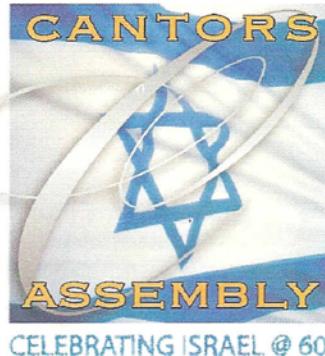


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Mazal Tov to  
**Cantor Larry Vieder**

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